













THE LITTLE WORLD  
OF AN  
INDIAN DISTRICT OFFICER



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The Little World  
of an  
Indian District Officer

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'BRITISH WORK IN INDIA,' 'HUMAN NATURE IN RURAL INDIA,'  
'A PLEA FOR THE BETTER LOCAL GOVERNMENT OF BENGAL'

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TO  
THE AUTHOR'S FRIENDS AND TEACHERS  
THE  
VILLAGERS OF INDIA



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## MAP

THE PROVINCE OF BENGAL IN 1874-1903    *At end of Volume*



**BOOK I**  
**TIPPERAH**



# I

## A THOUGHT

I MUST begin by explaining who I am, what this book is about, and why it was written.

I am a member of the Indian Civil Service, who, after serving for nearly twenty-nine years with credit, but without distinction, retired in the year 1903.

This book is the story of a thought. From the time when I first landed in India to the time when I finally left it, my great wish was to find a way of blending the will of the British Nation, the paramount power, with the will of the people among whom I worked. As experience grew there gradually came into my mind an idea of how that could be done. The very last thing I did for the Government of Bengal was to embody in a small book a working scheme for the purpose. The Government may be presumed to have thought well of the scheme, since it spoke most favourably of the book, and bought copies of it for distribution to officers.

This present book gives an account of the cir-

cumstances in which the scheme took shape and grew. It has been written because so little is known in England about those circumstances.

In the year 1883, during my first furlough, I began to realise the ignorance that prevails with regard to them.

I was putting it to a friend—a keen politician and a strong radical—that we, out there, must know more about India than our countrymen at home, who had never seen the country.

“Ah, that’s just it,” was his answer. “*You* know the *little* things, but *we* know the *big* things.”

By “*we*” he meant the class to which he belonged—politicians who believe themselves competent to direct from England the administration of our Indian Empire; and by “*you*” the class of which I was a humble member—Indian administrators. His class had nothing to learn from men like Sir William Muir, Sir Bartle Frere, Sir Alfred Lyall, or the Stracheys. The Gamaliels of India were in England, not India, and the place of Indian administrators was at their feet.

The things his class did not know were the *little* things, which there was no need for them to trouble about.

I have noticed ever since that this is the ordinary attitude of my friend’s class to my class. I do not propose to discuss it, but have three remarks to make on it.

My first remark is that it does not inspire trust. It has too much of the spirit of a saying attributed to a famous Oxford Don, "What I know not is not Knowledge," and too little of the humbler but wiser spirit of a far greater man—Sir Isaac Newton, who compared himself to a child playing with the pebbles on the shore of a mighty ocean.

My second remark is that my friend admits his ignorance of a part of his subject. True, he calls that part the "*little things*." But how can he know whether they are little or big when he does not know them? Again, how can he be sure of knowing *any* part of a subject unless he knows its details?

I fear, however, that my friend's class are too self-satisfied, and I am sure that they will always be far too busy to attempt mastering the details.

My third and last remark is that if they tried they would find it hard to get the details.

Each of the thirteen provinces has its separate staff, divided into classes—one of which is the Headquarters staff, and another, more numerous, the District staff.

The members of the District staff among them possess the knowledge and experience of the land and its people on which the Administration depends for the carrying on of its work, but each in a small part only of the province.

Their united knowledge and experience is gathered in and given to the world by the Headquarters staff. It reaches our friends at home



about as much resembling the original as a pot of bovril resembles the ox it was made of.

My plan has to do with our world of *little* things in India. This book is offered as a peep into that world, so little known in England—an account of the people, places, and things whose influence gave shape to the plan.

The book is not complete or comprehensive—merely that which a man who has done his life's work can remember about what he believes to be the most important part of it.

## II

### MAKING A BEGINNING

I ENTERED the Indian Civil Service in 1872, landed at Bombay in 1874, after a two years' training at home; crossed to Calcutta, a two days' journey by rail; and, after a further two days' journey by rail, river, and road, found myself in Tipperah, one of the forty-eight Districts of the province of Bengal.

Tipperah, in which I served my apprenticeship of over three years, lay between the great river Megna—the united stream of the Ganges and the Bramapootra—on the west, and the densely wooded hill ranges that divide Bengal from Upper Burmah on the east. In size and shape it resembled Norfolk and Suffolk combined, and its population was nearly two millions.

I had to begin by acquiring a colloquial knowledge of the language. I had already some book knowledge of Hindustani and Bengali, but soon found that the people here had a patois of their own no more comprehensible to educated Bengalis from Calcutta than to me. With practice I soon knew enough to begin those duties for which it

was necessary. Wherever a Civil servant goes, he is required to have a colloquial knowledge of the local dialect, and there are in this one province of Bengal more languages and more varieties of patois than in all the countries of the United Kingdom.

I must here pause to give a few facts explaining the state in 1874, when I entered it, of this province in which I was to serve for twenty-nine years.

Bengal was the first British possession in Northern India. It differed from all the other provinces of British India in that, soon after it came into our possession, towards the end of the eighteenth century, by a measure known as the Permanent Settlement the British Government created landlords, handing over to the persons whom it found paying the land revenue its rights as proprietor, subject to a quit-rent, which was fixed for all time. While Government retained the sovereign prerogatives, including justice and taxation, each landlord in his own estate was left with a very full control over all local affairs—police, roads, sanitation, and the like.

The objects of the measure were, mainly—

To secure the existing land revenue ;

To secure a loyal body of landed proprietors ;

By liberal treatment to make them kind landlords ;

By giving them all future profits, to induce them to improve and develop the land ;

To provide, for the administration of local business, a body like the squires who then performed that work in England.

The measure secured the existing land revenue, though at the expense of losing all future increase ; and it secured the loyalty of the landlords. But it failed to make them kind to their tenants ; it was not followed by the improvements and development expected ; local institutions—as, for instance, the Police—were either neglected or misused for their own interests by the landlords, who further usurped the sovereign prerogatives of levying war, justice, and taxation.

The measure was so far deemed unsatisfactory that it was never extended to any other part of British India.

In the fifties, just before the great Mutiny, the Presidency of Northern India, or Bengal, as it was called from its nucleus, which extended from Afghanistan in the west to China in the east, was broken up into provinces, of which Bengal was one. A Legislative Council was given to it with power to pass laws, especially for the regulation of local Government. During the twenty years of its life up to 1874, this Council was actively engaged in withdrawing public business from the landlords, and in arranging for its being performed otherwise. The law of landlord and tenant, the police, roads, sanitation, education, famine relief, census, and municipal work all engaged its attention.

When I arrived many measures had become law, of which some were in force and others were being introduced, while further measures were on the anvil. Everything was in a state of transition and uncertainty—a most interesting time, had I known it, which of course I did not.

### III

## LEARNING THE PEOPLE

So much for the province.

Let us now return to myself. Passing over the Government business of various kinds that had to be learnt, let us get to the beginning of my acquaintance with the people, whose progress it is the chief object of this book to trace.

I saw them first almost entirely from the Bench, on which, by the will of my superiors, I spent most of my time in the trial of criminal cases. Hundreds of the people—parties and witnesses—must have passed before me every month, out of the dark back into the dark ; themselves, and even, except in a few town cases, the places they said they came from, utterly unknown to me—strangers for the most part never seen or heard of before or after.

I had at first only the smaller cases to try—assault, trespass, cattle-rescue, and the like ; and later, as experience came, those that were graver, until at length I was entrusted with the very gravest, even murder, gang-robbery, and serious rioting.

On looking back I cannot but feel that this was

not a good introduction for a young civilian to the people of India. It confined my attention too exclusively to the seamy side ; and, as a matter of fact, it did not enable me to know the people at all.

I saw indeed many men of many varieties ; but each man for the day only, never before and never again. I knew not his people, nor his home, nor his surroundings. It was but a globe-trotter's glance I had of him. While he was before me, moreover, he was on his guard, and wore a mask.

In order to explain the situation to English readers I must give a short description of the system of criminal justice we had to administer.

It was modelled on, but differed widely from, the English system. The key to the difference was the fact that in England justice is a popular institution ; in Tipperah it was the business of the Crown. In England, justice goes to the people ; in India, the people had to come to justice.

An Englishman with a grievance finds near his own door a magistrate to take his information and grant a summons. If it is a Police matter, he calls in the constable of the beat. If the case goes to trial, the tribunal is never far off. Everything is done under the vigilant eye of the strongest and fairest public opinion in the world, and of a ubiquitous press, its organ.

In Tipperah the law provided that, as in England, the case should be instituted before a magistrate, or before the Police. But in all this wide area, as

large as Norfolk and Suffolk combined, there were only two magistrates, sitting, as it might be, one at Ipswich and the other at Norwich, before whom an information could be sworn, and from whom a summons could be obtained. An aggrieved person might have to travel any distance up to fifty miles over a roadless country to get at him.

A Police matter, again, involved a journey to the station, perhaps ten miles off; and if the officer was out on business, a hunt for him through the villages.

Trials were held only at the two places already mentioned, and involved much hanging about, many journeys to and fro, and a constant spending of money.

Here there was no public opinion; no press; no official aid, as there is, for example, in Scotland, to a man with a real grievance. He had to find his way to this strange tribunal in an unknown land as best he could, in charge of the police, whose tender mercies he dreaded, or alone.

If he went alone, it was not for long. Around the Courts were swarms of petty lawyers, who had their touts on the roads and in the villages. Long ere he came within hail of the Court he had been fastened on by several of these, and persuaded that his only chance of success was to put himself in their hands; say what they bade him; pay what, when, and to whom they told him; and, above all, to beware of telling the truth: it would never be believed.



In all probability the other side had got wind of his intention, and were racing him to the Court with their tale to meet his. Both sides would arrive about the same time; both were unknown at the Court; both had been schooled by the lawyers, and came forward, true man and knave alike, with tales which, in the opinion of the lawyers, were likely to go down with the magistrate. The lawyers were very Darwins in their patient study of the nature and habits of officials.

In those strange cases there was no common ground. Whatever one side asserted the other denied; all the witnesses were tutored; and whether true or not to begin with, the case as presented on both sides was invariably concocted.

There was in every case ample ground for dismissing it outright. But as it was desirable that people should not avoid our Courts entirely we had to discount a certain amount of falsehood, and content ourselves with what was called the "residuum" of fact—some grains of truth, when we could find them, in the heaps of chaff thrown down before us.

On thinking over the vexatious troubles and uncertainties of our criminal litigation, I often wondered what brought people to us at all. I did not believe that they did not mind distance, put no value on time, and liked litigation.

I for one came to the conclusion that nearly all, save a few of the graver cases, were episodes in some dispute not before the Court. The parties

were not the real parties, but puppets of others, who remained in the background, paying for and directing the proceedings.

Most of the genuine disputes never reached our Courts at all, but were settled at some earlier stage and in other ways.

The magistrate trying a case would often have liked to correct his ignorance by paying a visit to the scene of the occurrence. Sometimes this could be managed when the place was not too far off. It was seldom, however, that time could be spared. Every one had heavy and continuous duties to do, and what was to become of the rest of the work during the time spent in going and returning? Moreover, these trips, unpopular among the lawyers, who neither liked the journey nor were willing to stay behind, were seldom desired by the parties.

While we dispensed justice as best we could to those who came before us, we knew that an enormous number of injured persons never came to us at all. Many were deterred by difficulties in the way; many dared not come for fear of offending the local despot, who by threats of injuries—threats which he could carry out—was able to prevent them from complaining, and to stop the mouths of their witnesses.

Obviously we have a better system of justice in England than that practised in Tipperah. Why then, it may be asked, was the latter in use?

Simply because there were not the men to work

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the other. Neither the people nor the Government could entrust any one available with the power to issue summons, or to pass sentence of fine or imprisonment. All that had to be done by paid Government officers.

Whatever may have been the reason, I did not during my three years in Tipperah get properly into touch with the people.

I learnt a little about them, partly from reading and conversation, and partly from the rare excursions among them which duty permitted, but all that time I never got really close to them.

## IV

### LOCAL INFLUENCES

#### (a) *The Landlord*

THE landlord created at the Permanent Settlement was lord of the soil, subject to the payment of a quit-revenue. For generations afterwards, like the mediaeval baron of our country, he held his position by his own power.

If he was to be safe, he must have prestige. To get prestige, he must demonstrate his power to the world. There was no more convenient way of doing this than to show that he was above the law of the land by breaking it with impunity.

One landlord, when his Mahomedan tenants would not agree to his terms, had a basketful of beards brought in every day until they did.

Another imposed a sentence of twenty years' imprisonment, and, in spite of all the efforts of the authorities to find his prisoner, *carried it out*.

Another filched a large slice of a neighbour's estate by cutting through a neck of land and diverting the boundary river in a single night.

Deeds like these were continually being done,

and yet went unpunished, because no evidence could be got to prove them.

Lord Cornwallis' plan resulted, so far as Tipperah was concerned, in the District being divided up into territories or estates of all sizes, ranging from the thousand square miles belonging to the Rajah of Tipperah downwards.

The lord of each estate was as much its lord as our own mediaeval baron was of his. The law prevailing in it was not the law of the land, but the will of the landlord, who was master within it.

Two things only the landlord must not do. He must not have arrears of Government revenue ; and he must not offend the District Officer.

Neither of these limitations on his power interfered much with his hold over his people, for the revenue was payable by fixed instalments at the District headquarters, through agents and servants ; and the District Officer, having a large territory to administer and many things to attend to, rarely troubled a landlord with a visit. When he did, the time was usually passed in courtesies and entertainments rather than in business. True, the District Officer would sometimes speak roughly to his host, but then the people were not to know that ; and if the host came smiling out after a long spell of scolding, the people took it that he and the District Officer were on the best of terms.

Every landlord had his force of retainers, armed (since firearms were a State prerogative, and only carried by licence)—armed usually with heavy

iron-bound bamboo clubs. They were needed for lawful purposes, such as guarding treasure, going messages, and the like duties. They were also his instruments for overawing the villagers and for punishing those who had incurred his wrath. To "please the laird" they would go any lengths—would even kill a man, destroy his house, plough up the site, and sow it with salt.

The landlord was familiar with the boycott.

All the tradesmen—the barber, washerman, thatcher, potter, oilman—were in his hands. So were the Mullah and the priest—the ministers of religion. When he would he could withdraw their services from a man.

He could have cattle driven through his enemy's fields; filth thrown into his courtyard; the women of his house insulted; his house or stacks set on fire; his cattle driven away. No man who valued life and comfort dared offend the all-powerful lord.

What was there to interfere with the landlord?

The District Officer, indeed, loomed like Fate in the background, and was as little heeded in every-day life.

The Police—he was their local head, and they were in his pay.

The Courts could do nothing. If any man had the rashness to complain against him, no witness dared give evidence. And if so extraordinary a breach of discipline took place, his servants and money and lawyers brought him safely off, and he

was free to deal with the man who had dared to invoke the protection of the Court.

He had his own Court, where he administered justice to his people. It was a personal affront which he resented that any of his people should pass by his Court and seek redress for their grievances in that of the Government. Any one who disregarded his wishes on this point he punished.

The landlord's Courts—his administration of justice in them—were indeed illegal and punishable at law. Who cared?

The breaches of the law went on, and were not punished.

The authorities never heard of them officially unless the title of the landlord was itself being disputed. Then each side would strive to bring the other into bad odour with the Government by denouncing these among other misdeeds. But in the flood of false charges that poured in at such times an occasional true one passed unnoticed. For when two rivals contested the ownership of an estate it was civil war.

Before either side resorted to the Law Court there was a contest for possession—the best evidence of title. For possession bands of fighting men turned out and fought pitched battles, in which men were slain, and there were wanting hardly any of the incidents of real war.

Possession was an asset quite as valuable as title. Many a great family has been founded by

an adventurer who has forcibly taken possession of an estate over which he had little or no right, compelling the tenants to obey him as master and pay him rent, and has then bought out the legal owners at a price far below the real value of the estate.

In every great estate the importance of maintaining possession was recognised. One of the great ceremonies of the year was the "Punniar," when every tenant paid a small instalment of his year's rent as an acknowledgment that the payee was landlord in possession.

In those olden days the tenants were regarded as chattels, taking, perhaps, one side or the other in their lords' quarrel,—turning out when there was any digging or manual labour to be done, under the escort of his fighting men to protect them from attacks by the fighting men of the other side.

In my time there was only one family which held to these old traditions. Their influence so completely obscured that of the Government in their own estate that a new subdivision, or "out-post," of the District, with its headquarters at Chandpore, had to be established in their neighbourhood as a check on their power.

In general, a new state of things had taken the place of the old. There had been a change of the law which greatly increased the risk to landlords who entertained fighting men and waged a war of violence. But the chief cause of the decline of the



landlord's influence was the rise of a new influence—that of the peasantry.

(b) *The Peasantry*

The ruling ambition of the landlords was to own land, and the use to which they put their land was to let it to peasants, who cultivated it and paid rent. The landlord contributed no other service but to protect the tenants from the exactions of all others except himself—no small service, by the way—and perhaps to dig a drain or a canal or a tank. But under the old régime the tenant dared not call anything his own—his soul or his body or his goods—all was at the mercy of the landlord. There was nothing feudal in their relations, as the peasants had nothing to do with fighting. The landlord's retainers—of another breed—saw to that. There was not even the sympathy of race or religion; for while the landlords and their servants were mostly high caste Hindoos, the great mass of the peasantry were Mahomedans, nearly all descended from Hindoos of low degree converted in the time of the Mogul Empire. Tipperah was in the eyes of Hindoos a benighted region. They had a legend that their four heroes, the Pandabs, once came to the shores of the Megna, and one of them, Bhim, crossed it. But as soon as he landed he seemed to go mad, and talked like one out of his mind.

His brothers at once had him ferried back, and solemnly cursed the land east of the Megna. So now no respectable Hindoo families were willing to live there. The landlords and their clerical servants were nearly all Hindoos from outside the District—many in particular from the famous pergunnah of Bikrampore, near Dacca. The fighting men came from still farther west.

Now Tipperah was, even in 1874, full of jungle; and landed proprietors were everywhere on the look-out for tenants to occupy and clear it; so that here it was a case, not of tenants competing for land, but of land competing for tenants; and this was a state of things that gave to the Tipperah peasant a value and a good conceit of himself. If things were made unpleasant for him where he was, there were plenty of other places where he would be welcome.

The Tipperah peasant was, as a rule, healthy, hardy, and strong. Man for man he was physically a match for the ordinary fighting man employed by the landlords; and he had begun, for the reasons given above, to pluck up spirit.

What with this, and what with the increased risk and difficulty that now attended the use of violence by the landlord, the tenants became able to hold their own against physical violence.

Litigation they did not fear. They were themselves well versed in the trickery of the law, and met the landlord even there on equal terms.

The peasantry had learnt to unite. They

formed for the purposes of common action and common defence great leagues, thousands strong, having common funds, and employing, when necessary, the best lawyers.

As an example of how far these leagues would sometimes go, the case of Chagulnya may be cited. This was a detached part of the District, belonging to the Rajah of Hill Tipperah, and marching with his state.

The peasantry here had had serious provocation ; for the Rajah's land-steward had collected their rents without giving receipts, and had then brought actions in Court for the same rents, denying that he had received them.

The indignant peasantry of Chagulnya formed a league, and vowed to pay no more rent. They drove off the process-servers of the Courts who came to execute rent-decrees ; and even went so far as to invade the Rajah's own state and capture a fort, whence they came back in triumph laden with spoil.

Of course the peasantry were not always successful. Much depended on the spirit, wisdom, and resources of the parties. In some estates the landlords carried all before them ; in others they went to the wall ; in many there was something like a balance of power. But in all parts, whether they were at peace or at war, there were now two local powers in being instead of one—the power of the landlord and the power of the tenant. And whereas in some Districts the cry for a rent law

came from the tenants, here it came rather from the landlords.

As in another part of the District a subdivision under a Government officer was created to check a too-powerful landlord, a subdivision had to be created in the neighbourhood of Chagulnya to check these unruly tenants.

They gave a specimen of their spirit when I was there. My chief, the District Officer, was riding through on an inspection trip, mounted on an elephant, when the villagers ordered him to clear out. He mildly pointed out that he was keeping to the ridges and doing no harm.

“Be off!” they cried, “or we will beat you and your elephant!”

The elephant is in most places regarded with the utmost awe, and so is the District Officer; but here contempt was shown for both together.

The peasants were doubtless at the time elated with their successful defiance of the Rajah; and they were also ignorant of the force behind the District Officer travelling without escort. No troops had marched their way since the great Mutiny, when a native regiment which had mutinied passed up from Chittagong, and a British force in pursuit. Indeed the District Officer had a hard task to exert any influence, since the physical force at his command was quite inadequate.

To the ordinary villager in Tipperah, the “powers that be” were not the British Govern-

ment, but the landlord, or the peasant league, or both.

(c) *Society*

There was a third power to which the villager had to defer, and that was the power of society. Every Hindoo belonged to a caste, and every Mahomedan to a mess, which signified much the same thing. In these institutions harmony was the exception rather than the rule. Social ambition fired rival claimants for the leadership of their little circles, and in every village there were generally faction feuds raging. Active minds were busy, just as in our larger political field in England, devising plans for dishing the other side, detaching members from it, and generally putting their own side ahead.

But whether there was a feud or not, we found that every caste or mess had a ruling "punchayet" or Council, who decided all questions of social discipline or etiquette.

As a general thing, we understood that all but the gravest matters—and in some estates all matters without exception—were settled in the Court of the landlord, or by the social "punchayet." It was our opinion, founded on what we saw of the cases that came before us, that most of the genuine disputes were settled quietly at home, while those that came to us, especially those that seemed frivolous, were brought, not to get redress for the injury stated, but as a move in some deeper and

longer game, which derived its importance from issues not before the Court.

Nevertheless we had to go through the form of trying the ostensible cause in all seriousness.

(d) *The Police*

Under the system of Lord Cornwallis, the landlord was expected to take a place corresponding to that of the English squire, and to fulfil among other duties that of managing the Police.

The work of the Police was done jointly by the District Officer with his one or two assistants, and the landlords, with the help of paid subordinates. These were, on the side of the Government, the Darogah and his satellites, or Burkundazes, and on that of the landlord the village watch.

The Darogah was the Government official best known to the people of the land ; for there were many of this class scattered up and down in stations, each with his band of Burkundazes.

His pay was nothing compared with his pickings, which were enormous. He had great powers ; and with the native official of those days power meant wealth. In every case that came to his notice he expected a bribe ; and he was permanently in the pay of the local landlord.

His methods of detecting crime were mediaeval ; but he had a wonderful faculty that way when it was worth his while to use it. We must not wholly condemn the Darogah, for in those wild

times he doubtless had a difficult part to play ; and when loyal to the District Officer (as no doubt many Darogahs were, if the character of the officer was strong enough to hold their allegiance) he was the right hand of the Administration, going everywhere, taking his life in his hand, and playing the prestige of the Government against howling mobs of wild men.

I may put down two anecdotes which illustrate the Darogah's methods, though they did not come to my notice until after I left Tipperah.

A complaint had been made to me of serious damage done by a sub-inspector of Police. I went to the spot, and found that in searching for stolen property the sub-inspector had pulled to pieces a limekiln for burning shell-lime, which he had left in ruins. I remarked that certainly a good deal of damage had been done.

"One is not allowed," the sub-inspector testily replied, "to do anything thoroughly nowadays. I learnt to search under the great Bakáulla !"

Bakáulla was one of the most famous of the old Darogahs, who was made a Khan Bahadur and an Honorary Magistrate, and spent his old age in honoured retirement.

"How did he search ?" I asked.

"The great Bakáulla, when he searched a house, used to pull it to pieces, walls and thatch and all, and to dig up the ground on which it stood to a depth of three cubits. Nothing could escape a search like that !"

“But if there was nothing there after all, it was hard on the owner, was it not?” And that the sub-inspector grudgingly admitted might be the case.

The second anecdote was told me by a European who had been a planter. A Darogah had been investigating a criminal case in which a friend of his was interested, and at the close of the investigation brought three reports, which he laid before the friend.

“This,” said he, “will cost you 500 rupees; this 50, and this I will send for nothing.”

“I suppose,” said the friend, “that the first will be the cheapest in the end,” and paid the 500 rupees.

And so farewell to the Darogahs, those dreaded “harpies,” as they were called by a man afterwards distinguished—Ashley Eden—“who swooped down on a village as a vulture on a carcass”; for the whole system was condemned by the new Government of Bengal, one of whose first measures was to sweep it away and introduce a new system of Government Police.

The principle of the new system was to take entirely out of the hands of the landlords all control over the Police. The Police were provided with officers—a District Superintendent for every District, with assistants, inspectors, sub-inspectors, and head-constables; and the force was distributed over the District in stations and outposts.

I was to have much anxious thought over this



Police system later on, and so will not go into it here. We may pass from it with the remark that no doubt many of the old staff, like my friend of the search, were employed in the new; and also, in spite of the improved supervision, much of its old spirit, and many of its methods, forbidden though they might be, remained. The sub-inspector was and is commonly called the Darogah; and if popular belief does not err, continued to get his retaining fee from the local landlords.

The landlord, though cut off from all official connection with the work of the Police, continues to be held responsible for the keeping of the peace within his estate.

“No man can serve two masters.” The village watchman, as the joint servant of the Police and the landlord, had nearly everywhere been annexed by the landlord and had come to neglect the work of the Police. The new Police had been ten years in operation before the Government felt able to deal with the problem of separating the village watch from the service of the landlord.

The watchman was remunerated in one or all of three ways—by a grant of land, by cash payment, or by payment in kind—chiefly sheaves of grain at harvest time. This remuneration had to be broken up into two parts, that which he received for Police duty, and that which he received as servant of the landlord. The former was to be

kept, the latter to be given to the landlord; and then the balance needed for turning the watchman's pay as a Police servant into a living wage had to be made up. Under the old system the pay had been of no consequence; it was the pickings that mattered. But, though possibly—even certainly—the pickings would not cease, it was out of the question to compel the watchman to depend on them for existence.

So an Act was passed forming the village watch into a separate class, unconnected with the landlord; and providing for the restoration to the landlord of such part of the remuneration as might fairly be put down to the services of which he was being deprived; for finding such additional remuneration as might seem necessary, and for other matters connected with the administration and control of the watchman and his pay.

This Act was passed shortly before I came to the country; and the District staff were engaged in the task of putting it into operation.

The task, when one looks back on it, was an enormous one. It had to be arranged that every house should be in a beat, and that there should be a watchman for every fifty houses, more or less. And all this had to be arranged without the help of the landlords, for the design was to remove them from connection with the work.

In the work of dividing off the land I had no part. Indeed, I do not know if this was undertaken in Tipperah till after I had left, for the more

urgent need was to provide watchmen where there were none, and funds to pay them where, as was generally the case, there were not adequate existing funds for the purpose. The method decided on was to appoint "punchayets," or village committees, composed of the most respected and influential villagers, who should fix the amount needed, and distribute it roughly but fairly over the householders of the villages. It was to be the duty of the "punchayet" to collect the rate so assessed, and pay the watchman month by month. A margin was added to the sum needed for his wage to cover bad debts and cost of collection. I think the original idea was that there should be a "punchayet" for each watchman, so that the work of assessment and collection might fall light on the members, who were unpaid, and that the assessments, being made by the village leaders or their friends and neighbours, might be fair and undisputed.

The census taken in 1872 had revealed to the Bengal Government for the first time the vast number of the people it ruled over. In Tipperah alone the number of houses must have been over 300,000, and thus in all some 5000 watchmen would have to be arranged for, and several thousands of "punchayets."

Regarding the way in which the system worked in Tipperah I have little to say, for it was still in the initial stages when I left. My work was to introduce the Act, which meant finding,

interviewing, and appointing the members of "punchayets," explaining to them their duties, and ascertaining as well as I could whether they were acceptable to the villagers. The preliminary nomination was made by the Police, who were supposed to make local inquiries and ascertain who were the fittest and most acceptable. Owing to the pressure of many duties I had to economise time to the utmost. For that reason, and also in order to get discussion, I used to summon a large number of proposed members of "punchayets," with such of their villagers as chose to attend, to a local centre, whither I went to meet them. At such a meeting, which was attended by hundreds, explanations were given, questions invited, and argument was encouraged. I used to try to get one man to answer another.

I remember an incident at one of these meetings that indicates one of the dangers we had to guard against.

It was being held at a place near the bank of the great river Megna, and people had been streaming in all morning. We were in the full swing of discussion when one man got up and asked :

"How much have we to pay for writing our names down?"

"Nothing," I answered.

"Then," he said, "why is your clerk making us all write our names in his book and pay a rupee each?"

I said I did not believe it.

My questioner answered: "He is sitting in a boat down there by the river, and making each of us as we pass write his name in a book and pay a rupee. He says it is the order." And this was corroborated by others.

I called my two clerks, the only men who were with me, and asked if it was either of them. No, it was not.

Then an officer was sent with the man who complained to find this mysterious stranger, but he had gone away in his boat long before, taking with him a good fat bag of rupees.

The man, of course, was a swindler. The instructive thing in the incident was that all these men, selected as the village leaders, seemed to have taken it as a matter of course that they must pay for the privilege of approaching a Government officer.

It says something for the District Officer's influence, that very few of those invited to take up this unpaid and disagreeable duty of assessing and collecting funds should have thought of refusing.

The experience I had in these meetings came to be of use to me after I had left the District, but led to nothing more while I was in Tipperah.

## V

### PUBLIC WORKS

#### (a) *District*

UP to the time when I joined very little had been done to develop communication in Tipperah. There were no steamers touching its shores, and the nearest point on the railway was Goalundo, many miles distant. Only one road of any importance existed—that from the river Megna through Comillah to Chittagong. It had been maintained by Government, and was probably the same by which the Mogul Prince Shuja, son of the Emperor Aurungzib (who lived in the time of our Queen Elizabeth), marched to the conquest of the pirates of Chittagong. His resting-places are marked by the great water reservoirs at Comillah and elsewhere, which tradition says were dug for the use of his army.

The provision of good roads was another of the many duties which Lord Cornwallis' plans had assigned to the landlords, and which they had neglected.

Attention had been sharply drawn to the want

of roads by the terrible calamity of the Orissa famine in 1866, when multitudes died of starvation, though there was abundance of food for them if it could have been transported to the places where it was wanted. The great loss of life on this occasion brought such discredit on the Government that every precaution that could be thought of to prevent a repetition was taken. Of the measures adopted one was for the construction of roads. Roads are by no means a perfect safeguard against famine, even if there be an abundant supply of food to send by them ; for famine means drought, and drought means want of fodder and water, and without these draught-animals cannot work. For such times railways are especially valuable. But roads also are needed ; and the new Act, which came into force in Tipperah about the time I joined, provided for the raising of a fund by means of a cess or rate on the rental of land, and the construction by its means in every District of a system of roads.

In Tipperah, the need of roads was not so urgent from the famine point of view as in most parts of Bengal ; for, in the first place, the nature of the climate made the risk of famine much less ; and in the second, the District was well provided with waterways. Even in the dry season there were rivers and canals, navigable at all seasons, and in the rainy season every village had its waterways connecting it with the outside world, every house its boat.

This latter circumstance has much to do with the prosperity of the Tipperah peasantry. In Districts where communication is by land, the produce of the harvest must be sold and got away immediately after the harvest, before the rains make the roads impassable, and at that time prices are low. Here, on the contrary, the produce lies until the waterways are open, and is thus sold at the season when prices are high.

A scheme of roads was framed, and work was begun, but made little progress before I left. I think most people regarded the fund as a temporary expedient for providing original works, such as sites, embankments, and bridges; and thought that when the work in the District programme was finished it would either be closed or greatly reduced.

In a District like Tipperah, with its turf roads, and all the heavy traffic waterborne, this was not an unnatural view to take.

I only remember two matters connected with the road fund worth recording.

One was a question of principle. A canal from the south stopped outside Comillah, about a mile or more from another waterway, the river Goomtee, and the traffic on the road connecting them was very heavy. A proposal was made to metal this mile of road, but objected to by the District Officer on the ground that the cost of metalling was not a proper charge on the road fund.

The other illustrates the risk of interfering with



water. The river Dacatya in the south-west of the District, winds about, and finally enters the Megna. A long way from its mouth the Dacatya approaches very near to the Megna; and the District Officer thought it would be a good idea to join the rivers by means of a canal. The canal—a narrow little thing—was cut, but great was the alarm when it grew wider and wider, until it became a wide river. At Chandpore, the place where it joined the Megna, standing on the bank amid the fragments of wrecked boats cast up by storms, we could see to the west of us no land—only the tops of the palm-trees of Backergunj, silhouetted against the evening sky.

Many years after, I landed at Chandpore from a steamer, and took train for Chittagong. It was now a busy port with wharves and warehouses, and steamers coming and going daily—so the little canal became a roadstead.

Roads were in after years to become my hobby, and we will come back to them.

In connection with water there is also the question of floods. The river Goomtee, which flowed past Comillah, was confined between two embankments, of such a height that when they were full to the brim the river was some eight feet above the level of the town. The embankments were a great anxiety to us, for the Rajah was supposed to keep them up, and, being neglected, they were full of rat-holes. When leaks developed, we had the utmost difficulty in getting men to

work at stopping them. The population seemed to be divided into two classes—those whose caste forbade them to labour with the hands at all, and those whose honour forbade them to work save in their own fields. It was a degradation to such a man to work as a coolie. I remember one whose house stood below the leak, and would have been swept away had the embankment burst, and who yet utterly refused to do a hand's turn to save the embankment.

"It's not my business," he said, "but that of the Government" (by the way it was not the Government's business but the Rajah's), "and they must keep it up—I won't."

I went out to help at the leak about the time this was said. The river was almost lipping the bank. A rat-hole had scoured, and the whole bank was a mass of soft mud held together by a skin of turf. We took a bamboo and thrust it by the mere pressure of our hands twelve feet down into the mud. The public works sergeant was seated on a box, utterly done—not able to speak above a whisper, for his voice was gone with much shouting; and in this land swarming with sturdy peasants, the only labour we could get to work at the leak was that of the prisoners from the jail.

This curious sense of honour was so general among the peasantry that we had to get our labour for public works from the other side of the province, hundreds of miles away. And when I wanted men to pull my punkah I had to get them

from Orissa, as far from Calcutta one way as Comillah was the other.

I remember spending a whole night walking about looking after our prisoners at work on a breach above the town ; and we had in readiness a large armed party of police, who were to cross the river and, if it were necessary to save the town, cut the opposite embankment. The peasantry on the other side had got wind of this, and were assembled, about a thousand strong, armed with clubs, to resist the cutting and save their fields. Our own bank, however, gave way hopelessly, and the water poured through the breach past the town, flooding the country for many miles around. We took boats out of the river through the breach into the flooded country to help the villagers. I remember, as we crept in our boats up the opposite bank to get above the breach, we had to pass close to the serried ranks and gloomy faces of the peasantry thronging the bank, still suspicious of our designs, now abandoned.

It was a quaint experience sailing into the water-logged villages, and picking off men, women, and children. Many refused to come when we could not fetch away their cattle. They would not desert the cattle.

The greatest storm I was ever in was the cyclone of 1876.

This brought up a storm wave, which swept over the islands in, and the mainland near the Megna, drowning some 100,000 people, and leaving behind

it disease and famine; for it spoilt most of the food; swamped with sea-water most of the drinking-water tanks, and destroyed the scavenger-birds and beasts,—vultures, crows, adjutants, and jackals. I spent the night of the storm in a rest-house, which was blown down over us; and in the morning, sending out into the village, or town, for it had a civil Court and a school, and many respectable inhabitants, I found it had only a house and a half standing, and they were full of zenana women. As I made my way home that day on foot most of the houses were flat, and the country was under water.

We were touring in the south of the District that cold weather and found that groves of betel palms had been laid flat by the storm.

The owners came clamouring. “Bring a suit against the cyclone,” said the Police Inspector cynically.

When a loss came in that country a man had just to stand it, for there was no insurance.

### *(b) Municipal*

The sanitation and management of towns was another work then in its infancy.

In every considerable town a Board had been formed. Only four municipalities in all Bengal were allowed to elect their Boards, and none of these was in Tipperah. The Board for Comillah was appointed by Government, and in due course



I became a member. Nearly all our members were native Indians.

The town site was an artificial one, being formed of the soil dug out of the reservoirs or tanks, of which there were some 160, varying in size from a lake of over thirty acres to little ponds.

These tanks we had to keep clean—especially the tanks reserved for drinking water, on whose cleanliness depended the town's immunity from cholera.

Cholera was one of our bugbears. The great Chittagong road, which passed through the town, was a route for pilgrims to the hot springs of Sitakoond in the south; and there was a diversion road to take them round the town without entering it. Pilgrims are always a danger, for in their travels they may at any time take cholera by drinking bad water. The native Indian is not indifferent to the water he drinks. When talking of a strange place, the first question he asks is usually what the water is like. But he seems to take no precautions, and drinks what comes in his way—never thinks of boiling or filtering.

We used to cart away the rubbish and filth, a thing which the people, as I found later on in older towns, never thought of doing. The sites of the older and closer built towns were masses of filth—the accumulated garbage of generations, a thing which made of them veritable pest-holes.

Our hospital was another purely European institution. It was managed by the Government

surgeon, and subscribed to by all the Europeans in the place, and by some native gentlemen.

The school I remember little about. To one like myself fresh from a British school, a noteworthy point was the want of discipline. The masters dared not chastise the boys physically, and so far as I recollect the only punishment used was petty fines.

The boys, even in those days, were inclined to be insolent on the roads, by way of showing their independence—a great contrast to their demeanour after leaving school, when they were looking for employment. They were humble enough then.

They did not play games. I remember we tried to teach them cricket.

Nearly every European used to pay the fees of one or two poor lads. I don't think we expected much good to come of it; indeed the chief result seemed to be that having educated them we were expected to find them work to do. But many years after I had a pleasant surprise. I got a letter from a man in Calcutta who thanked me for what I had done for him, and said he had prospered in life and now owned two drug shops in Calcutta. It is a thing rare, and therefore gratifying, to get a letter that is not a begging letter!

One of our great terrors was fire. The houses in the European quarter were comparatively safe, being well detached from other buildings; but the native town, in spite of the tanks and greenery

interspersed with it, was exposed to great risk. It was built almost entirely of inflammable materials — wood, bamboo, and thatching-grass; for the Rajah, the ground landlord, the main produce of whose independent dominions consisted of these things, would allow no masonry buildings to go up. Indeed it was whispered that to improve the market for his produce, the bazaar was every now and then set on fire. Whether by accident or design, certain it is that hardly a season passed without the town being swept by fire. And a fire once started, in dry weather, with a favourable wind, could not be stopped. It ran along from house to house, over-leaping all obstacles. I have seen it jump across the main street of the town, a hundred feet wide with a double row of trees, at one leap. (This main street itself had been widened out by a former District Officer after a fire.)

If we were sitting in Court or office, and a cry of fire arose, there was a sudden stampede. Clerks, lawyers, and the general public were off without waiting to ask for leave, sprinting for their homes or lodgings; and the rest of us had to go too and help.

It was no joke on a hot day in May, with the ordinary temperature over 100° in the shade, to plunge into the torrid and smoky zone of a bazaar fire, pulling down houses amid the protests of the owners as the only chance—a faint one—of stopping the course of the flames.

One thing is to be said for this, that after a couple of hours of it the ordinary temperature, however many degrees in the sun, felt cool and fresh.

Outside the Police we got little help. The "gentry" stood and looked on—those who were not occupied with their own houses; and except that some perched themselves on the ridges of their thatched roofs with pots of water ready to put out chance sparks, the householders were to be seen, each seated upon his box in the middle of the road, howling lamentations.

The most irritating of all our fires was one that happened while we were working hard to stop a leak in the river embankment, for it destroyed the food that had been collected for the workers. It seemed hard that when we were doing our best to hold in check the one element, the other, its mortal enemy, should take us in the rear.

Insurance, as has been remarked before, was unknown.

We had no fire engine. There was only one, I think, outside Calcutta, in all Bengal, got up by a District Officer, and it was currently believed that on its inauguration a fire broke out, "with true native tact," in the house of his head clerk.

I was to see much more of municipal work elsewhere; but in Tipperah I had not much to do with it.



## VI

### IMPRESSIONS

#### (a) *The Pivot of the Administration*

I soon began to appreciate how greatly the District Officer bulked in our system—how heavily the Government leaned on him. He was the head of everything. In a land where nobody went about—where the landlord sat at home surrounded by his little court of sycophants, not even going round his own estate, and where the peasantry, tied down by hard work and ignorance, never stirred beyond the village; where no one ever read; where there were no newspapers or reporters, he was the one man who knew the District; for he toured about it, and he and his people knew one another.

A couple of years before, he had, in this illiterate country, among this people wedded to custom and abhorring the unknown, been called upon with an unpaid staff to enumerate for the first time in history his million and a half of people; and by his moral influence he had done it.

He had been called on to assess and collect a new tax—the road cess—involving a separate

valuation of the holdings of scores of thousands of peasants and middlemen; and he had done it. He was practically the road Board, preparing the scheme of roads and carrying it out; for he alone of the Board's members knew the District as a whole. He had been 'called on to organise and supervise the thousands of village Councils; to see that they appointed good watchmen; assessed and collected fair rates, and paid the watchman's wage punctually; and he was taking this huge task in his stride.

He was the moving and regulating spirit in the whole vast and complicated human machine which we call the Administration. No matter what scheme the Government took in hand—what law it passed, the District Officer was the man looked to for putting it in action.

### *(b) Religion*

In Tipperah, religion was a great dividing line. On the one side the Hindoos, a small minority; on the other the Mahomedans, the great majority—about four-fifths of the whole.

The Hindoo minority included almost all the landed proprietors with their servants—clerical and menial—and all the professional men.

Of the native Indians in the service of the Government all above menial rank were Hindoo.

This monopoly by the Hindoos of all public appointments, to the exclusion of Mahomedans,

seemed unfair. We had indeed a strong feeling that it was, though it could not be helped.

The Mahomedans made it a grievance, complaining of the Hindoo ring in every office, which fired out every Mahomedan who found his way in. The Hindoos, on the other hand, said Mahomedans did not get their share of Government employment because they had no men fit for it. It was indeed a known fact that few Mahomedans had any training worth speaking of. When a Mahomedan lad was educated, his education began, and too often ended, with learning the Koran, by no means a complete training. Whereas Hindoo boys swarmed into Government schools, very few Mahomedan lads found their way there, and they, beside their nimbler-witted Hindoo comrades, were backward and slow. If you saw in a class of small boys a youth head and shoulders taller than the rest, you were pretty sure to see on his head the skull-cap which marked him for a Mahomedan.

I can only call to mind one Mahomedan clerk—and he was in the Judge's office. I got him to teach me Hindustani, and I remember our studies were interrupted by my tutor's arrest and trial for embezzlement.

The Tipperah Mahomedans were, for the most part, descended from low caste Hindoos converted in the time of the Mogul Empire. Had they remained Hindoos, their exclusion from the Government service in favour of the higher castes would

have been taken as a matter of course. Was that not the common lot of all Hindoos not of the chosen castes ?

Doubtless, however, their complete separation in religious faith, and the effect of their own religion, which exalts the Mahomedan above the rest of mankind, and teaches that all sons of Islam are brothers, gave them a pride and an ambition such as their ancestors never had.

They had energy—which found vent in agriculture, in trade, and on the sea and the great rivers in steamships and boats. They had acuteness of mind, as is shown by their keenness in litigation; and they had political ability, as appears from their engineering of their great leagues.

The great religious festivals—the Hindoo “Hooli” and “Durga Poojah,” and the Mahomedan “Bakri Id” and “Mohurru” —were celebrated with the usual banging of drums, blowing of trumpets, and shouting of men. The Hindoo festivals had more deference paid them by Government than the Mahomedan, since practically all the clerks were Hindoos. But as most of the litigants were Mahomedans, it generally came about that if the office was closed only on Hindoo holidays business was merely nominal on those of Mahomedans. To close office on the latter was inconvenient, for as the day depended on the seeing of the new moon it was uncertain till shortly before the time.

The festivals were held with much less of the bitterness and none of the rioting that occurred in other parts of the province. The Mahomedans, on their part, did not think of interfering with the processions of their landlords and their superiors, while the Hindoos, being a small minority, many of them foreigners, did not resent the sacrifice of cattle if not obtruded on them. In the sword play and gymnastics all alike joined impartially, for they all loved a "tamasha."

(c) *Some Mysteries*

It took a long time to get used to there being so many things that we did not know, and could not find out.

One of these, which we fight shy of to this day, is what goes on in the zenana. Its tragedies—they are believed to be many—are acted in the dark. We cannot violate its privacy, so deadly is the disgrace; and the risk of an inquiry being made on false information given with the sole object of bringing disgrace on the house is so great, that on the whole it is thought better to let such things alone.

Another mystery is the cause of death. We have no medical certificates, nor, save for an occasional Police inquiry, anything like a coroner's inquest.

In a hot climate dead bodies have to be disposed of quickly; and snakebite or cholera accounts very

easily for a sudden death, if by any chance it comes to notice.

In the effort to bring a body in for post-mortem examination by the civil surgeon, many a real tragedy has happened—many a life has been lost.

We have now got some safeguards against forgery in our system of registration. It is no longer possible to forge a deed with a date twenty years back, a sort of crime that used to be very common.

But even yet, in a land where executant and witnesses alike are unknown to the registrar, and false witnesses are cheap, we are not safe from personation.

A remark that once came to my ears thirty-five years ago sank deep into my mind, and made an impression perhaps out of proportion to its value.

A venerable and well-dressed witness was standing in the box before me; and the lawyer on the opposite side whispered audibly to his colleague, his eye twinkling :

“They put a new wrapper on him, and call him a gentleman !”

Fraud is always plausible, and I fear we have not yet killed it.

Another thing about which there is always much doubt is a Mahomedan marriage. When I went to Tipperah, an attempt was being made to remove the uncertainty by providing for the registration of Mahomedan marriages. This plan was in some quarters objected to, for the odd reason that

husbands feared lest if the knot were tied too tight their wives might be tempted to poison them. A suggestive fear !

But why go on ? We lived in the midst of mystery !

**BOOK II**  
**GOALUNDO AND SERAMPORE**





## I

### GOALUNDO

THE time came in the spring of 1878 when, after three and a half years of work at Headquarters, I had to take my turn of subdivisional work.

A subdivision in Bengal is a part of a District which for some reason cannot be conveniently managed from Headquarters, and is accordingly placed in charge of a subordinate of the District Officer, who is known as the Subdivisional Officer. Subdivisions are created for various reasons. There was one in Tipperah, while I was there, in the north. It had been made, I never heard why. Possibly because it was on the way to Agartola, the capital of Hill Tipperah. We have seen that two other subdivisions of Districts were formed on the south side: the one to hold in check a masterful landlord; the other to keep in order an unruly peasantry.

I was transferred from Tipperah to the subdivision of Goalundo in the District of Fureedpore. This subdivision had been created because Goalundo was the terminus of the lately constructed Eastern Bengal Railway, where the

Ganges and Bramapootra meet. Goalundo was 150 miles north-east of Calcutta, and the united stream of the two great rivers passed on thence to Chandpore, the nearest point of Tipperah, some hundred miles lower down.

I was less than a year at Goalundo, and three months of that time were spent on leave. I was also very busy, having no assistant and at least two men's work to do. I cannot call to mind any particular experience of local Government work proper. It will be enough, therefore, to set down a few things about Goalundo that seem worth chronicling.

The first is the might of the great rivers.

When the railway was made, a number of important buildings had been set up at the terminus, and to protect them a great masonry spur had been thrown out, at a cost of 17 lakhs of rupees, or £170,000. But hardly had it been completed when the river Ganges cut in behind it, and swept away spur, buildings, and everything. I found when I went no dock or wharf. The steamers had all to lie on the open bank, and people had to go on board by a rickety plank. It was at such a landing-place that Bishop Cotton was drowned, falling between the steamer and the bank.

The Railway Company were, when I went, digging a large dock to accommodate their steamers in shelter from the stream during the rainy season. The dock was dug, and lasted till the rainy season, when the river came down in

flood, bearing with it the silt of the far-off Himalayas, and in a day or two the dock was filled up with mud. When the floods began to fall the stream sawed off the bank, softened with water, in huge lumps, and so fast was the bank melting into the river that men were busy day and night lifting rails to save them.

There was a family of indigo planters here who had owned fourteen indigo factories, all of which but two or three had been washed away.

Kooshtea, the other point where the railway touched the Ganges, about forty miles away, had been left by the great river two miles inland, while the original Goalundo, having been submerged, was coming out again on the opposite bank. The whole District of Fureedpore, of which my subdivision was a part, was formed of old banks of the Ganges, which had been at first shoals, had then risen above water, and had finally been left high and dry by the river. It was a succession of ridges and hollows, the ridges being the successive banks of the river, and on each ridge were great villages, once standing by the water side, now inland.

The inhabitants were of a type new to me. The agricultural population was mainly composed of Chandals, of whom the story went that they had been a community of Hindoos of many castes, who had all, from Brahmins downwards, been out-casted and banished to what were then the great swamps of Fureedpore. They made themselves

mounds in the midst of the swamps, and lived by fishing. Gradually the swamps dried and became rich land, and the Chandals from a race of starving wild men became substantial yeomen, increasing abundantly in wealth and in number.

They were warlike, turning out when they had occasion with shield and spear to sustain their rights. Having risen in the world, no longer content to be outcasts, many of them changed their caste name to "Namasudra," which attached them to the Hindoo body, though beneath the soles of its feet.

Goalundo was a great fishing centre, sending whole train-loads of fish daily—fresh and salted—down the line. The salting industry was encouraged by a refund of the duty on all salt used in it.

The work that kept me most busy was another new task which had been laid on the broad shoulders of the District Officer, for this was the first year of the Licence Tax on trade. Every trader with an income of £10 a year and over was made to pay the tax, and we had assessors all over the country finding out those liable to pay it. I had to hear the appeals, and had to go through in this new field the old experience of coming to a vast number of decisions on most unsatisfactory evidence. Office work and the trial of cases of various kinds kept me busy till next spring, when I was moved on to Serampore.

## II

### SERAMPORE

My new subdivision was a complete contrast to both Tipperah and Goalundo.

The area under my charge was small, as subdivisions go—350 square miles ; but it was like one great suburb. It lay between two rivers, the Hooghly on the east and the Damoodar on the west, about thirty miles apart ; and formed a strip about twelve miles wide, separating the Headquarters division on the north and Howrah on the south. All these were parts of the District of Hooghly.

The origin of this District is curious. Hundreds of years ago the great arm which the Ganges threw off before passing on to join the Bramapootra was the river Saraswati, the boundary between the Districts—kingdoms, as they would be in the old days—of Burdwan and Nuddea. On this river stood the old Portuguese port of Satgaon, where ocean-going ships received and discharged their cargoes.

The river, as so many Indian rivers do, gradually closed, and in these days has all but dis-

appeared, the channel shifting to what is now the Hooghly, on which river all the powers then trading with Bengal formed settlements—the Portuguese at Hooghly, the Dutch at Chinsurah, the French at Chandernagore, the Danes at Serampore, all on the west bank, and the British at Calcutta on the east.

All these places except Chandernagore now belong to the British; the last to be acquired, Serampore, having been bought in 1845. Serampore was twelve miles from Calcutta, or rather Howrah, the suburb opposite Calcutta; and from Calcutta and Howrah northward on both banks of the Hooghly there was, when I went there, a continuous line of town all the way to Serampore and for fifteen miles beyond it.

Doubtless the closing up of the Saraswati and the great importance of the Hooghly were the causes why the District of Hooghly was formed by taking a slice from Burdwan on the west and Nuddea on the east. The origin of the two parts is still well known to the inhabitants, and its memory is perpetuated by the use of two different units of measurement, the Burdwan cubit being 20 inches, while that of Nuddea is 18.

On the twelve miles of bank in my subdivision were five towns, with some 60,000 inhabitants in all—Serampore, the largest, being the middle one, with two north and two south of it. The highest land was the river bank, formed of the deposit left by the river after floods; for this was the delta of

the Ganges, a quaking bog with a thin crust of firm soil on the top, which grows softer the deeper one goes—not a stone or anything hard, but pure mud.

At the back of the towns to the west is a belt of marshy ground separating the banks of the Hooghly from the high banks, similarly formed, of the Saraswati, which are occupied by a line of small towns or large villages only less populous than those on the banks of the Hooghly.

Beyond stretched the land of the old Burdwan kingdom, ridged with the sand—not Ganges mud, like the Hooghly deposit—brought down by the many streams that carried the spill waters of the sandy Damoodar.

The population of this rural part must have been enormous. Even after it had been decimated by fever, there were large rural areas with more than a thousand inhabitants to the square mile. Five municipalities had been created in the five river-side towns; the interior was left without municipal Government.

I spent nearly four years in this subdivision, and never had charge of a subdivision again; so that I had never been before nor was again so closely in touch with the people.

I learnt, chiefly from the work and from discussions with the people, a great deal about local Government, and formed views on it which I have held substantially ever since. I shall, therefore, dwell somewhat at length on my time at Seram-



pore, for there is much to tell, even if much is left out.

I had to make special efforts to get into touch with the people, for I was the fourth subdivisional officer within a year, and this had estranged officer and people.

### III

#### THE TOWNS

I FOUND myself the official Chairman of five municipal Boards. The largest municipality—that of Serampore—had the privilege of electing nearly all the members of the Board, being one of the four in Bengal that could do so. The Boards of the other four, and a few members of the Serampore Board, were appointed by Government. All the five Boards elected their Vice-Chairmen.

The five towns lay along the river bank, with the East India Railway at the back of them. The Eastern Bengal Railway ran behind the towns on the opposite bank. The river, about a quarter of a mile wide, formed the boundary between our District of Hooghly and that of twenty-four Pergunnahs. Both banks were supplied with numerous ghauts or broad flights of steps descending into the water, and the river swarmed with boats. It was a tidal river, with a strong current up or down, according to the tide.

Howrah and Calcutta on the west and east

banks respectively were about half an hour distant by rail; and in the twelve miles of rail serving my subdivision there were six stations. There are more now. Thus the five towns were in effect suburbs, whose intimate connection with Calcutta will be realised when I mention that there were in my subdivision upwards of a thousand season ticket-holders travelling back and forward every day.

The five municipalities presented a great contrast, not only with all the places I had ever seen, but with one another.

To begin with, Serampore was a long straggling combination of a town and three villages. The town—Serampore—had been built and developed in the time of the Danes, who owned a patch about the size of modern Chandernagore—two square miles. Old Serampore was built when there was no railway, and when carts and carriages were not used. The streets (what a contrast to Comillah, with its mat- and -thatch houses, and Goalundo, with its open waste!) were narrow and crooked, and hemmed in with ancient and decayed brick houses and brick walls. There were relics of Danish rule in the old Government House (my residence), with the market at the back and the old Danish godowns, or stores for goods, on the river bank in front; the Lutheran church, now used by the Church of England, and the famous College of the Baptist missionaries—Carey, Marshman, and Ward. There

were even human relics; for among the many odd characters that came about us were an old native gardener who had served Carey, and could patter the botanical name of any plant, wild or cultivated, that one could show him, and Bibi Surita, widow of the old interpreter to the Danish Government.

The Danish method of government seems to have been kindly but resolute. Every householder was made to clean out his compound once a fortnight, on pain of having it done by the public authority at his expense. The penalty for most offences was a box on the ear. When the judge condemned a man to pay a fine he got the fine for himself; but there was an appeal to Copenhagen, and if the decision was reversed, he had to refund double the fine. There was once in those days a doctor who had a garden in which he grew opium—a profitable crop when there was a chance of smuggling it into British territory. At present I believe the solvency of the French Settlement of Chandernagore is largely secured by a subsidy which our Government pays on condition that no opium or salt is manufactured within its limits.

The village of Chattra, on the north side of Serampore, was, like Serampore itself, a maze of densely packed streets, clustered around the great dwellings of the Gossain family—landed proprietors. Serampore and Chattra were full of Brahmins. The Mission College had been of

immense service to the Brahmins; for it had educated their youths at a time when education was rare, and had thus enabled them to get employment all over the presidency of Bengal. Two other important schools had been founded in the subdivision, probably owing to its example.

In the midst of Serampore, beside the old College—in Dr. Carey's old garden, in fact—there had been set up a great jute mill, which brought trade to the place and many workers.

On the south side of Serampore were Mohesh and Rishra, renowned in the old days for their Juggernaut cars, to the dragging of which a crowd of some hundred thousand people used to assemble every year—an anxious time, which we were always glad to see the back of.

Two more jute mills (one of them in Warren Hastings' old garden) added to the importance of Rishra.

Connagar, south of Rishra, was a village of Brahmins. Its school was their great source of livelihood; for they trusted in their education to get them a living. Connagar was the southernmost part of Serampore municipality.

To the south of it was Kotrung, which became a town through being the site of the Calcutta brickfields. These had been made in a place known as the "thieves' garden," so called because here had been a grove of fruit trees under which batches of prisoners on their way to Calcutta used

to rest, with their escorts. Kotrung was a separate municipality.

On the south side of Kotrung was the famous little town of Utterpara. Utterpara was the Mookerjea family, and the Mookerjea family was Utterpara. This family—its greatness, its intestine feuds—were well known all over Bengal. Its blind chief, Joykissen Mookerjea, was known in his day as “King of Bengal”; and the people of Utterpara were all its clients and servants.

Passing back north, beyond Chattra, we come to Baidabatty, famous for two things—the great produce mart of Serafooly, and the Champdany jute mill, built on what used to be in the old days a nest of robbers. From this nest, which lay on the river bank just at the point where the Grand Trunk road crosses it, the robbers or dacoits used to pounce impartially on travellers by land and travellers by water. In these days it is not easy to realise the perils of travelling before the Mutiny.

North of Baidabatty, between it and the French settlement of Chandernagore, was the ancient trading mart of Bhadreswar, whose merchants before the days of the railway used to store their goods in great warehouses, on the watch for a favourable market in Calcutta, to which the goods could be run down by boat on a single ebb tide.

Railways, the telegraph, and the agencies of great produce houses up country have greatly

reduced the profits of the Bhadreswar merchants, but they were in my time still an influential body.

These were my five towns, and they presented a great variety.

## IV

### THE VILLAGES

THIS description covers the rest of the subdivision outside the municipalities.

A rough idea of what was called the rural part may be gained from the single fact that its average population (excluding the municipalities) was nearly 1000 to the square mile. The villages contained five times as many people as the towns, and filled the area between these and the bank of the Damoodar.

As in Goalundo, the villages were on the lines of old river beds, the first and most important group being those on the banks of the Saraswati, the ancient boundary between Nuddea and Burdwan, west of the marshes; and most of the others on the banks formed by the spill of the old streams that carried the flood waters of the Damoodar across the land. This they were now prevented from doing by the great embankment which had been formed down the east bank of the Damoodar.

The courses of these old streams, raised above the ordinary level of the land by the deposits



which the floods left, and therefore of little use as drainage channels, were known as "dead" rivers. Many of them had been effectually closed by cross dams, and converted into fish-ponds or irrigation reservoirs, or even into cultivated land. The dense rural population was engaged very largely in "intensive" cultivation of sugar-cane, "pan" (the betel leaf), potatoes, vegetables—all of which require much labour.

Besides these the field crops proper, chiefly rice and jute, occupied every cultivable piece of land.

The interior of the subdivision depended for transport entirely on roads; for there were no navigable waterways except the river Hooghly on one side and the river Damoodar on the other.

There were in the villages of the interior many old families, and rich men who had made their fortunes in Calcutta and other parts of India; and there was the famous shrine of Tarkeshwar, one of the holy places which are visited by Hindoo pilgrims from all parts of India.

## V

### IN A SUBDIVISION

THIS then—these towns and these villages—was my little world which, under the wise system of the Government of India, I had been set to learn, work for, and do my best by.

Looking back, I feel very strongly how wise was the system that created this situation. On the one hand was a British Government desirous of doing right by the people over whom it ruled, full of good purposes, great principles, and broad ideas: on the other hand, the people over whom it ruled, vast in number, varied in composition, having interests that clashed with those of the Government and with one another; ignorance to be enlightened, and prejudices to be overcome.

How were these two to be brought together? Clearly by knowing one another. Interests may be reconciled; ignorance is not always really ignorance, but is often only partial knowledge—knowledge, perhaps, of things of which those who dub it ignorance are themselves ignorant. Prejudices may have better grounds than those

who impatiently condemn them are willing to admit.

In our own country Government and the people are the same thing ; for the people are in the last resort the Government. In India it is not so, and it is doubtful—*pace* those fiery zealots who would make it so as the only decent and proper condition of Government—whether such a thing as a Government can be manufactured. The safer rule seems to be, as St. Paul advises, to accept the power that is.

Indeed, for the British Government of India that is the only possible course, for its first step towards the other must necessarily be to give up, as being foreign, all control of the matter, and abdicate.

The course the Government actually took was this. It selected in the way it thought fit young men educated and brought up in the United Kingdom. I happened to be one of the young men whom it selected. Such men are supposed to be saturated with the British spirit, and to possess the characteristic British qualities. It gave me at home a two years' training in the form which it thought best calculated to prepare me for my work. It took me out to India, and gave me a further five years' training in practical work. After all this apprenticeship, it planted me in a little section of the Empire to carry on its business, and to get in touch on its behalf with the people.

When I entered on my work at Serampore it was with a feeling that I must not only carry out orders and get through work, but also study problems and find things out. I must detect wrongs and how to set them right; see wants and how to supply them. This, which I venture to call research work, is a service that the British nation and the British Government in India are entitled to expect of all European officers selected and trained as I had been.

The object of my book is to give some account of this research work, the ideas that occurred to me, and what came of them. The descriptions of work, places, and people that it contains are merely incidental, for the purpose of explaining the research work.

I have always looked back on my time at Serampore as the period of my service when I was closest to the people, and had better opportunities than I have ever had since of getting to know them. The work was hard and often irritating; the place from many points of view was undesirable as a residence; but there was this fascination. My people and I were very close together during those four years. I knew or cared little what went on in the great world outside, but was constantly occupied with my people and their affairs, and can honestly say that I made their welfare my constant thought, and gave them the best that was in me.

It made all the difference to be working on

familiar ground instead of on a small scale map ; with individuals instead of masses and averages ; with people I knew instead of with strangers seen once and quickly forgotten. It was refreshing to wander about among the folk, see them in their villages and chat with them free of the restraint of lawyers and clerks, or the caution that is necessary when talking business.

This is a condition most favourable to the work of research.

Ideas used to be struck out in the course of work or of talk. Many of them fell to the ground ; some in which I still believe never had a fair trial, because of the opposition of higher authorities, and some were tried and succeeded.

I hope it is not ill-natured to say that when an idea could be tried without consulting any one, the trial was very often successful ; but if others at a distance and in high places had to be consulted first, the idea was generally either twisted out of shape and pronounced a failure, or quietly stifled and laid aside.

There are some of my ideas, produced in those years, which have suffered this fate, and of whose revival some time or other I still have hopes. But it will not be in my time, and others will get the credit.

## VI

### MUNICIPALITIES

I WRITE of events of thirty years ago, without memoranda, and can therefore only put down what comes back to me. There may be errors, but I hope not many, as I aim at leaving out anything I am not sure of.

The town with whose management I had most to do was Serampore, in which I lived. The four outlying towns were under my general supervision as Chairman, their business being in the hands of the Vice-Chairmen. Owing to circumstances, the gentleman who was Vice-Chairman of Serampore when I first went had to be absent in Calcutta all day, so that the work he would otherwise have done fell to me.

This gave me a closer insight into the business of Serampore than I would otherwise have had.

Serampore had an area of five square miles, and a population of about 30,000. As already mentioned, the population was concentrated in the north end and around the two jute mills in Rishra. The rest of the town was sparsely occu-

pied, chiefly with what we would call villa residences, standing in their gardens, whose masters formed a part of the crowd of daily passengers to and from Calcutta, where they were in business.

*Elections.*—Probably because of the number of its educated men, and because of its close connection with Calcutta, Serampore was one of the four municipalities which had the elective system. And what an ultra-democratic system that was! It gave a vote to every recorded ratepayer, however small the rate paid. Women had votes; and one little boy of eight claimed the right successfully.

I brought to the notice of the Government some abuses of the system, with the result that the law was amended. Women and children were deprived of votes, and a minimum qualifying rate for voters was fixed. Because of this minimum, not only many voters, but even half the elected Commissioners, were disqualified.

This shows the insignificance of many of our Commissioners; or, if it does not, then it points to another abuse not less serious—under assessment.

*Assessment.*—Perhaps the prime weakness of the municipality was assessment; and, seeing how the assessment was done, this could hardly fail to be. The town was divided into eighty small circles (if I recollect rightly), in each of which a nominee of the elected Commissioners assessed his neighbours—his friends and his enemies; and behind these

came an appeal Bench to earn popularity by reducing the assessments thus made.

The assessors had no doubt a difficult task ; for native families lived in their own private houses, which were never sold or let. A house of most imposing appearance might be occupied by poor people, since it was the custom for the poor relations to dwell in the family residence, while the prosperous members withdrew and built themselves new and separate dwellings.

A successful professional man, whose income died with him, would also leave to his heirs a fine house, which they could not keep in repair.

But there were abuses as well as difficulties—one of which was the use of influence to lighten the taxation of one's friends, and pile it on one's enemies.

Influential men liked to get the town's money spent near their own houses, and to get the town's servants to do their private work. They also liked patronage. A strong set was made to get rid of the conservancy overseer—a Eurasian—to make room for a Bengali. There being no plausible reason for dismissing him, the device was adopted of cutting down his pay to half in the budget for the next year—an action only abandoned on the interference of the Government.

*Nuisances.*—Personally I thought the Eurasian better suited than a high caste Hindoo for a post involving the investigation of nuisances, which was often very nasty work.



The Baidabatty municipality had a Hindoo overseer. I can distinctly recollect one day when, accompanied by him and some Hindoo Commissioners, I went to inspect a horrible nuisance. These things had to be faced, and I went close up; but the Commissioners and overseer stood afar off, with their handkerchiefs to their noses, awaiting my return.

*Supervision of Work.*—Our Commissioners were fonder of attending meetings and making speeches than of practical work. To encourage them in this latter branch of duty, I generally arranged that when a work, such as road repair, was being done, some one Commissioner should be in charge of it.

Such a work was once being done. I myself kept my eye upon it. When it was completed, and the bill came for sanction, the Commissioner in charge jumped up, and in an eloquent speech found fault with every part of it—material bad, breadth and depth of metal defective, and consolidation badly done.

I had to point out in meeting that, although I had myself visited the work daily, and never seen it without correcting something, this gentleman had not, all the time it was going on, called attention to a single fault. I pointed out how unreasonable it was to keep silence while the work was in progress, and then to abuse it when it was covered up and could not be tested without taking it up again. Truly our Commissioners,

of whom this gentleman was one of the best, did not shine as business men !

*Want of Funds.* — When I first joined the municipality it was desperately hard up. Its funds were crippled by having to meet a heavy charge for the town Police, a force created by the law to take the place of the old village watch.

In the midst of our distress we got a requisition from Government to repair a stone-metalled road hitherto repaired by Government, at a cost which would have made us bankrupt. This latter charge we escaped on a legal objection, for which I was indebted to the Government's own engineer.

The Government, being impressed with our financial distress, undertook the charge of the town Police, on condition that we spent the sum set free on sanitation.

One main object we had in view was a drainage scheme, which was to cure the epidemic of malarious fever. I believe this drain was made in the end, but all the time I was there we never got beyond talking about it.

*"Doctors."* — The fever was one cause of the springing up of a large number of "Doctors." We had one or two qualified medical men, but quite a swarm of "Doctors," for any one who liked could call himself "Doctor." A compounder of six months' service would blossom out as one, and he would employ a compounder who a few months later would also assume the title. One

moderate-sized village out west had sixteen of them.

So long as the fever lasted, and practice consisted almost entirely in selling fever mixtures, things were not so bad. But when with the abatement of the fever that source of income failed, and "Doctors" took to general practice, much mischief was done. They enticed patients by charging low fees, and fleeced them by frequent changes of, and high charges for medicine. I met with a case where a quack "Doctor" had sued an old man, whose only son had died on his hands, for payment of a bill amounting to several hundred rupees, and had got a decree. I was so impressed with the evil of letting quacks disgrace the honoured title of "Doctor" that I suggested that it should only be allowed to qualified men. But nothing came of my suggestion.

There was a very common idea abroad that medicines issued from our public dispensaries were not good stuff. My servants, when sent there to be treated, invariably asked for a letter, which they thought ensured them against getting bad medicine. Possibly where things were not well looked after drugs might sometimes be used that ought to have been thrown away, as happens often with our domestic stores; and there may have been rogues who used the good medicine in their private practice, substituting inferior drugs for the dispensary patients.

In medicine, however, as in all other departments, we had intrigue. It was commonly believed that one well-known medical practitioner kept touts on the road leading to the hospital, to turn intending patients away from the hospital into his consulting-room.

Our ayah was one day sent to be treated at the hospital. On her return she said that she had met an unknown man in the bazaar, who told her that the hospital medicine was no good, and persuaded her to buy from him some quack mixture or other, instead of getting what she needed free from the hospital!

Sometimes the intrigue was more actively malicious. In a Calcutta native paper there appeared a paragraph relating that a serious accident had occurred at Serampore; that the case was taken to the hospital, where the only hope of saving the patient's life was instant operation. But the civil surgeon, a Bengali, wishing to go to Calcutta, tied up the limb and went off without operating. The case grew worse in the night, and as a last resort a private practitioner was called in and operated. It was too late: the patient died.

I was directed to inquire into this very grave charge against the civil surgeon. It appeared that there had been an accident; that the case, to all appearance desperate, was brought in; that the civil surgeon did operate, and that the patient recovered!

The only punishment any one received for this most reckless and malicious libel was that the paper which published it was also made to publish my report.

Chiefly because of the mills, and the frequent serious accidents, an officer of the rank of civil surgeon was posted at this subdivision, though such charges were usually held by officers of lower rank.

This particular officer was old, loyal, and even distinguished in his profession. But he had two faults which made him unpopular. The first was that he was a weaver by caste, and the second that he did not mix in local intrigues. He was about the only man in all Serampore whom I could trust not to repeat things I told him.

*Encroachments.*—The Bengali householder took an extraordinary delight in making encroachments on the public road, and the method of proceeding well illustrates the patient persistence of the race. A fence of split bamboo would separate his land from the public road. This fence rotted in about a year, and was renewed, the new fence being stuck just in front of the old one. Thus an inch was stolen. The same thing repeated for twelve years secured a whole foot. I have known of roads being squeezed in this way narrower and narrower, and by a last bold move closed altogether with a cross fence.

There is a tree called the "Sajana," or horse-radish tree, which has the special property that

a thick branch of it stuck in the ground at once takes root. Many a time has such a tree been pointed out as proof of old possession. I remember on one such occasion I pulled at an old-looking Sajana tree, and it came up in my hand. It had only been there a day or two, and the first of the roots were beginning to sprout. A few weeks later it would not have come up.

Sometimes the roadside awning of a shop would be supported by a bamboo sloping in to the doorway. By-and-by the pole would be set upright on the road; and if the process was not stopped, the pole would get fixed in the ground, and then would be replaced by a brick pillar, and a raised plinth would be built round the pillar up to the house. A successful encroachment was a feather in a citizen's cap.

*Local Trouble.*—Each municipality had its own troubles that needed constant attention. In Uttarpara the chief trouble was the keen rivalry between the branches of the Mookerjea family, which turned every incident into an occasion of quarrel. When I first went I found in full swing an encroachment case—the Vice-Chairman, head of one faction, seeking to remove as an encroachment a large brick erection put up by his rival.

These feuds extended far beyond the narrow limits of the pretty little town where they all lived.

Kotrung, so far as I remember, was under the influence of the Uttarpara factions. Serampore

had its own party feuds; and in Baidabatty other fierce factions raged. The Vice-Chairman of Bhadreswar, a worthy, but not energetic gentleman, was too much of a King Log, one result of which was that a clerk was tempted to commit embezzlement, and fell. Embezzlement was an offence very common, and we were constantly being asked to devise safeguards against it. I never knew but one satisfactory safeguard, and that was thorough and prompt accounting.

Oh the weary effort—the constant fight against that pet Indian vice of procrastination! It pervaded every department and every business.

*Meetings.*—We used to begin our Serampore meetings at eight o'clock in the morning, and they lasted till ten, when there was a general stampede, most of the members having to catch the train for Calcutta, where they went to business. I believe it was not uncommon for a caucus to be held in the train going down, where past events were discussed, and future events arranged for.

The oratory, if unrestrained, was apt to interfere with business. On the one occasion when I remember to have left my Bengali assistant to preside, the meeting lasted the usual two hours, but not one of the ten items of business on the agenda was disposed of.

## VII

### LANDLORD AND TENANT

IN the Serampore subdivision the conditions of landlord and tenant were entirely different from those in Tipperah or Goalundo.

At the time of the Permanent Settlement, when Lord Cornwallis fixed for ever the land revenue of Bengal, the land of the huge estates of the Maharajah of Burdwan, of which this District was part, had been nearly all brought under cultivation, and the revenue fixed for him to pay was therefore very high. The Maharajah, finding himself responsible for so large an annual sum, took the precaution, just as insurance companies do now when they have very large risks insured, to let out a great part of his estate in "putni." The tenant in "putni" became in fact proprietor of his tenure, at a rent fixed in perpetuity, like his landlord's land revenue, and liable in the same way to be sold summarily for default. When it is remembered that the land revenue payable by the Burdwan estate amounted to something like forty lakhs of rupees a year (£400,000), and had to be paid to the very day



on pain of forfeiture, in a time when capital was scarce, banks were not, and a bad season might stop the income from his tenants, the Maharajah's anxiety is easy to understand. His only way of insuring was to keep a hoard of his own (which he did), and to make use of this system of putni, to create which for his benefit a special law was passed.

The whole of Serampore subdivision was let out in putni; and as each village usually formed a separate tenure, the interests of the landlord were cut up into small parcels, instead of one interest covering a country-side.

Thus the landlord, facing his tenants, had usually large resources outside of his rents; and the tenants, facing the landlord, formed no great leagues. Each village stood by itself.

Again, the tenants were nearly all Hindoos, without the spirit to oppose their high caste Hindoo landlords. It was once remarked to me of a great and prolonged contest in the Courts between a Mahomedan peasant and his Hindoo landlord, that had the peasant been a Hindoo he could not have kept up the fight. The tenants were a timid, peace-loving folk, who asked for nothing more than to be left to attend to their field work, with enough to live upon.

The landlords, though they sometimes employed their west country clubmen to cow the tenants, usually shunned a reputation for violence. So many were courtiers—personal friends of the heads of the

Government, that in their circle violence was not "good form." They preferred the equally profitable and safer weapon of litigation.

The Mookerjea family—Brahmins—of Uttarpara, were admittedly the leaders of this new school of landlords—the school which, abandoning the old loose, though not always easy-going, methods, pushed their legal rights against the tenant to the utmost legal limit.

They were to a great extent the outcome of the first great land law of the Bengal Government—Act X. of 1859, which, by defining things, made it easier to litigate about them.

I am going to illustrate their methods by giving an account of some proceedings of members of the Mookerjea family—proceedings such as the Tipperah landlords would not have thought of—new at least to me.

### ✓ *Joykissen Mookerjea and the Middlemen*

The first case is that of Joykissen Mookerjea, the blind "King of Bengal."

He was, above all things, thorough—a keen man and very suspicious. He trusted nobody, and, blind as he was, did everything himself. As a small sign of this great man's personal force of character, I would like to mention one thing that I noticed. At our road fund meetings, which were held at Hooghly, he was always present. The thing that I noticed was this—

the District Officer, who presided, was a somewhat anxious man, prone to watch the faces of members, to see how they were taking things. But practically the only face he watched all through the meeting was that of Joykissen Mookerjea, the blind man.

Baboo Joykissen's managing clerk, who lived in Serampore, and went to office daily by rail, once told me that a certain time was allowed him to get from the station to his employer's house, and if he was a minute late he had to account for it, lest in that hot-bed of intrigue he might have been allowing himself to gossip on the way.

In the same spirit of suspicion the village bailiffs were shifted about at frequent intervals, to prevent them from forming local ties.

He was very accessible to his tenants, receiving personally all who came; and had the reputation of being a considerate landlord to the peasants—the actual cultivators.

There were in these old estates many privileged tenants—peasant proprietors or middlemen—who had held for generations at privileged rates. They had got their privileges in a variety of ways. Many, as being of high caste and unable to work with their own hands, paid lower rates because they had to hire their labour.

To all middlemen and privileged tenants, Joykissen Mookerjea was a terror. He used every device of litigation to break them down and

squeeze them out. It mattered little to him whether he won or lost in the end. He would never own himself beaten until he had exhausted every process of every Court that was open to him, up to the Privy Council in distant London. He, a rich man, was fighting with poor men, who could seldom last out the contest; and it came to be generally understood that the man whom Joykissen Mookerjea attacked was bound in the end to get the worst of it. The adversary, therefore, usually took the prudent part, giving up a decree even if gained, for the best terms he could get. So Joykissen Mookerjea's formidable reputation rid him of his middlemen at a moderate cost.

It is to be acknowledged that, so far as we knew, the blind man used well the control he had thus acquired. He dealt considerately with his peasantry, and spent large sums on improvements—schools, dispensaries, hospitals, and other works of charity. In his guest-house at Uttarpara he entertained all the most distinguished Europeans in Calcutta.

### *Harihar Mookerjea and Makla*

The next instance I shall give is that of Joykissen Mookerjea's nephew, Harihar, and the village of Makla.

The purchase of this village, which lay next to, and under the windows of Uttarpara, was the

origin of that terrible family feud which rent the Mookerjea family into factions.

The old proprietors have been described as good and indulgent landlords of the old stamp—men who, if they passed through the village fields, veiled their faces that they might not be tempted to covet the crops.

I may pause to note a small matter that illustrates the spirit of the more modern landlord. There is a paper mill at Bally, near Uttarpara, whose manager wanted to buy banana fibre for making paper. At his request I tried to get the tenants interested, but in vain.

“What is the use?” they replied. “If we sell banana fibre, it will only be a pretext for our landlords to raise the rent!”

Joykissen Mookerjea, who was not then blind, and his brother Rajkissen, both desired to get this village of Makla, whose easy-going owners, eager to be rid of so dangerous a possession, were ready to sell; and Rajkissen secured from them a deed of sale. Joykissen produced another deed bearing an earlier date, and this was denounced as a forgery. Joykissen was prosecuted, tried, convicted of forgery, and sent to prison. From this time forth the brothers were deadly enemies.

Thus Rajkissen became the owner of Makla, which passed into the possession of his son Harihar.

Now the rents of Makla, not having been

raised since the Permanent Settlement, could not now be raised by the landlord. The question was fought out at law between Harihar and a tenant, who being a Brahmin and a man of some substance, could keep up the contest; and it was decided in favour of the tenant.

But the landlord was not done with Makla, and this is how he managed. He somehow got his tenants to agree to pay their rent in monthly instalments—twelve in the year; and if any tenant had more holdings than one (as many had) he treated each as a separate transaction. He gave a separate receipt for each instalment of each holding—that is, if a man had five holdings, he got sixty receipts in the year.

When this practice was fairly established, all at once the landlord refused to take the rent, and filed suits in Court, one suit for each item for which he gave a separate receipt. Thus against the man above referred to with five holdings he brought sixty lawsuits. If I remember rightly, twenty thousand rent suits were instituted in Makla alone.

If the tenant did not appear, judgment went against him by default with costs. If he appeared and admitted the debt, he had still costs to pay. If he denied the debt, pleading that he had tendered the money, but it had not been accepted, the chances were that the Court refused to believe the plea, seeing that the landlord was only claiming rent at the rate admitted by the tenants, and

why should he not have taken the amount due if it was really offered ?

Even if he won his case the tenant was a loser. The landlord had a bottomless purse : the tenants were poor men. The landlord was ready to go on in this way indefinitely : the tenants were being ruined. So the tenants were persuaded to give the landlord the tiny increase which he was asking for, and get back to their fields. This was the fatal step. They could no longer say the rents were unchanged ; and in a few years Harihar had doubled the rents of Makla.

The law indeed gave value to the tenant right, which is proved by the fact that one of the Mookerjeas bought up the tenant rights in a village of which the other was landlord. But the right is of no use to any one not provided with money to defend it.

I fancy few of us Government officers realised what a fearful advantage our system of Law Courts gave to the rich man over the poor. It placed the poor man at the rich man's mercy. We were not exposed to its risks, since no lawsuit could be brought against a Government officer grounded on his official action save with the sanction of the Government. But for that, a rich man could at any time have paralysed the Administration ; for we were all poor men, and could not have afforded the cost of a course of litigation.

*Monohar Mookerjea*

The third instance I take is the dealings with another village of Monohar Mookerjea, brother of Harihar.

I was one day in my camp, having left my Bengali assistant in charge at headquarters, when a large party of respectable-looking peasants appeared before me to say that the agent of their landlord, Monohar Mookerjea, had got from the officer in charge at Serampore a summons against some thirty of their leaders to show cause why they should not be bound over to keep the peace.

“What he wants,” said they, “is to raise our rent. This is a plan to coerce us. We are peaceable men, but if we are required to find sureties, where are so many to get them? We shall be sent to prison.”

I do not reflect on my assistant, who no doubt did his duty according to his lights; but they evidently thought he had done something that I would not have done had I been there.

I decided to try the case in the village; fixed a day and sent out notices. The day came, and we were all there—the bailiff, the villagers, and two most respectable lawyers, one on each side. I still remember their lawyers' names—Debi Churn Bhattacharjya and Parmeswar Mookerjea—two Brahmins—leaders of my little bar.

For the landlord it was alleged that, having reason to believe the tenants to be in possession of



more land than they were paying rent for, he desired to measure the land of the village, so that he might get his dues. The villagers threatened his man with violence. Hence the bailiff's complaint.

The villagers replied that they had not threatened, and did not intend to use violence.

The real object of the landlord, if he was sincerely wishing to measure was, they said, to substitute for the village standard cubit of 20 inches—the Burdwan cubit—the Nuddea cubit of 18 inches as the unit of measurement, which would make every 81 acres appear to be 100, and would be equivalent to a 25 per cent rise in the rent.

But no, the bailiff admitted that the Burdwan cubit of 20 inches was the village standard, and he proposed to use that. I suggested to the parties that, as they seemed to have no ostensible difference, the measurement should go on, and the two lawyers should see fair; and this was agreed to. The villagers who had been called on to give security were discharged, and the case closed.

But the peasants shook their heads.

"It's the rent they want," said they, "not the measurement. You will see, the measurement will not go on."

And they were right.

I got reports from time to time, always of delay, and nearly always on the landlord's part. One day the bailiff busy, another a chainman sick, or a chain broken—always something; and at last

pretence was abandoned: the measurement fell through.

Sometime after I mentioned this matter to the landlord himself.

"Yes," he said, "I must get more rent."

"Surely not," said I, "unless you prove your claim for excess land."

"No matter for that," he said. "One way or other the rental must be raised."

Which I thought somewhat undiplomatic if bold language to use to a Government officer. Monohar's clever father or uncle or cousins would not have spoken so, but he was always counted the stupid man of the family, and his bluntness was a sign of it.

The Indian word for straight also means stupid. That man is straight who has not the wit to be crooked.

But I have heard it put otherwise by my old clerk, when I asked him once whether he thought a certain public-spirited man who had once been tried for fraud was really guilty, he said—

"Who knows? Men go crooked because they don't get leave to go straight."

So with these two aphorisms we may leave this question of Indian guile and pass on.

## VIII

### LANDLORD AND TENANT—*Continued*

THE landlord had always two documents for every village—the rent-roll, in which was entered the annual demand against each tenant, and the demand-roll, which showed the whole demand against each tenant, including arrears and interest.

Both of these were to a certain extent unreal.

Thus I knew a village whose rent-roll showed an annual demand of 2000 rupees, and the demand-roll showed that the village owed the landlord in all 60,000 rupees—thirty years' rent.

Thus either 2000 rupees was not the actual sum collected, or 60,000 rupees was not the actual amount recoverable, or the figures of both were misleading.

The demand in the demand-roll was to a great extent made up of compound interest, and of irrecoverable amounts. I knew of one landlord who, when he sued for rent, and part of his claim was allowed and part rejected, deducted from the arrear demand the part of his claim allowed, and retained in it the part disallowed.

Some insight is obtained into the way of

accumulating arrear demand from the case of Makla, where the demand rose in (I think) five years from 80,000 rupees to 120,000 rupees, though in each of these five years a sum of rather more than 5000 rupees, the annual rent of the village, was collected.

What was the object of these large arrear demands being kept hanging over a village? Whatever its object, its effect was to nullify the provisions of the rent law giving the tenants occupancy rights and freedom from arbitrary enhancement.

The difference between the kind and the harsh landlord was not the absence or presence of a large arrear demand, but that the kind landlord left his tenants a margin: the harsh one stripped them bare.

To give the new school of landlords their due, they nearly all believed, good and bad alike, that it was not good for a tenant to be let off with a lower rent than the full rack-rent of his land. It would either encourage bad husbandry, or, if he had a margin, would bring in the baneful influence of the money-lender. They preferred, if tenants were to borrow, to be the creditors themselves. Thus in many cases the landlord had a double hold—as landlord and as creditor.

When I was in Serampore a Tenancy Act for Bengal was in preparation. Indeed the last few months of my time in the subdivision were spent in making a special inquiry for that law. One

object of the Act was to give the tenant an independent position. An old, wise, and much respected landlord once told me frankly that that was impossible.

“Whatever you do,” said he, “we have ways of forcing them to do our pleasure.”

As I have mentioned the Tenancy Act, there is one section which I regard as my own contribution. I owed it to the suggestion of a Civil Court judge, who, being impressed with the great difficulty a tenant sued for rent had in proving that he had tendered it, suggested that the fact of having remitted the rent by postal order should be accepted as proof of tender. A section to this effect was added to the Bill, and, I believe, has gradually become more and more useful with the lapse of time.

If there was any one thing that gave a tenant a position of independence, it was to have a house site of his own on a permanent title. It was the ambition of every substantial tenant to have this, and large sums were sometimes paid to get it. With such a possession a tenant was somebody, and could presume to have a will of his own.

One thing which, while it brought on the peasantry many troubles, also saved them from many, was the frequency in the great families of intestine quarrels. There was hardly a family of position without its feud. There is a saying in India that one generation makes a family,

the second carries it on, and the third breaks it up. There was in Serampore a great family, though not of high caste—the Dé family—which seemed to be an exception. The ancestor who founded it had laid a curse on the first member who should cause a breach in its unity; and the family grew until in the great house in Dé lane there were some five hundred inmates. Many members longed to break away, but each feared to lead the way because of the curse. At length, a widow who was entitled to a microscopic share of the family wealth having been induced to face the consequences and sue for the separation of her share, straightway the whole family seemed to fly to pieces in a perfect storm of disputes and litigation. I made an effort to get them to settle, but it was no good. I left the storm in full blast.

The quarrels of the Mookerjea family, in Uttarpara, to which reference has already been made, were notorious. Tradition had it that before my time there had been a reconciliation, when 250 criminal cases at the time pending in the Courts were withdrawn. This gives an idea of the scale of these quarrels.

When Sir Ashley Eden was leaving India, a party was given in his honour by Baboo Joykissen, and advantage was taken of it to effect a reconciliation, which was followed by another general withdrawal of lawsuits, an exchange of visits, and an abandonment for the time of hostility. The

friendship, I fear, did not last. There were bitter memories; and in that closely packed hive of humanity, where everybody was on the look-out to take offence, things were always happening to give it.

And then all the family servants and hangers-on were interested in the continuance of quarrels, which made them useful and important, and gave them pickings.

These family feuds used to surge up into notice every now and then when something happened to attract attention, and again sank out of sight, so far as we were concerned, raging on below the surface.

The great family nearest to us were the Gossains, who lived within half a mile of my house. They had not one, but several feuds going on at once. One phase of that between Baboo Gopikissen and his nephew Hemchandra, was a social contest for the favour of the Brahmins, waged by a continual series of feasts and distributions of presents. It suited well the mendicant Brahmins, who wanted for nothing while it lasted.

When a feud was in progress, every little incident became an occasion for a trial of strength; and with houses "semi-detached," like those of the parties to this feud, incidents came "in whole battalions."

As an instance may be cited the "Naubat Khana" case. It was made, for his own purposes, as public as possible by one of the parties.

A “Naubat Khana” is a flimsy perch supported on poles high above the ground. Seated on it musicians discourse their music, which, like the old man’s, if not handsome, is strong. Such a “Naubat Khana” was erected by the chief of one faction opposite the house of the other, on a piece of waste land which was the common property of both. He filled it with musicians who diligently exerted themselves to make a din with their drums, horns, cymbals, and other noisy instruments. The offended chief sent men to pull down the erection, and his rival sent other men to prevent them. There was an affray, and a criminal case—the sort of case which, happening among lowly folk, one would expect to see settled before the village elders; and which, if brought into Court, would be disposed of in a few minutes. But the pride of two great men would not suffer a result so commonplace. Eminent counsel were engaged on both sides, and the case was puffed out to such dimensions that by the time it was finished it had cost each side at least twenty thousand rupees (£2000), enough to have covered the whole ground in dispute with silver.

Hard by the houses of Baboo Gopikissen and Hemchandra was that of another member of the Gossain family—Romanath, conspicuous for the great Corinthian pillars of its portico. One day I was sitting at my work in Court, when a man rushed in wild with excitement, and cried out that so and so, naming one of the three



owners, had burst open the door of Romanath's house, and was defending it with a sword, while his men were forcibly removing its valuable contents.

I at once went round, and found a sturdy youth standing, sword in hand, in the open doorway of the house. When questioned he said he was entitled to a share of the contents, and was taking his share.

It appeared that, seven years before, the house had been closed by the joint consent of the three owners, each of whom had put his padlock on the door. It had only been opened once since, in presence of my predecessor, for necessary repairs. I went in, and found a splendid reception room, which had been luxuriously furnished with thick carpets, well upholstered furniture, great cut-glass chandeliers, and everything fine. But the carpet had gone into fluff; the furniture was faded, tarnished, and insect eaten; and the great beams of the ceiling were shored up with bamboos and rough posts planted about on the floor.

I ordered the door to be fastened up again, and then came the drollest part of this odd business.

The idea of putting on three padlocks was that the door could not be opened save in the presence of all the three part owners. But on examination I found that the staples for the padlocks had been fixed on with screws from the outside, so that with the help of a screw-driver the whole might at any

time be taken off and put on again without disturbing the padlocks! I had the staples properly riveted this time.

The above are a few instances, taken from conspicuous families in my own immediate neighbourhood, of that great Bengali institution "Doladoli," or the faction feud, which had possession of almost every family—especially of every great family—in the land. I remember being particularly asked to notice as a remarkable phenomenon two brothers living in one house in perfect harmony. And thus it was especially true here that a man's foes were they of his own household. I know that whenever I showed signs of forming a friendship with any of the gentlemen I was in contact with, some warning or remonstrance never failed to reach me—some request to avoid him. I recommend this fact to those who blame the reserve shown by Government officers towards the native gentlemen of their Districts.

To those who have no official duties or dealing in connection with them, it is safer and easier to form intimacies with them; but for an official to be on terms of friendship with individuals and at the same time keep up a reputation for impartiality is not easy.

After leaving Serampore, when on furlough I went to eat my dinners at the Middle Temple. It is the custom there to dine in messes of four. One day I dined in the same mess with a Bengali law student, and the conversation turned on Indian

politics. It was the time of the Ilbert Bill controversy.

The Bengali student was a strong advocate of what would now be called "Swaraj." I had learnt that he came from the very town of Serampore where I had been living.

I pointed out to him that one of the difficulties in the way of our trusting native gentlemen more was that they would not trust one another ; and reminded him of the many family feuds in that immediate neighbourhood.

All at once I recollected that a retired subordinate judge of the same name had come to see me in Serampore, and mentioned that a young relative had gone to England to read for the bar. I asked my messmate if by chance this gentleman were related to him.

"Yes," he answered, firing up. "He is my uncle, and the greatest enemy I have ! By forgery and perjury he has defrauded me and my brothers of our inheritance !"

I had never heard of this particular feud, nor could I readily believe the charge made, seeing that a subordinate judge is of a class of men picked for their high character and integrity. In this family, if anywhere, one would have expected to find the exception that proves the rule ; but no ! the rule prevailed !

Though often embroiled in these intestine feuds of their landlords, the tenants on the whole had an easier time when the landlords were too busy with

one another to have time and attention to spare for the tenants.

A noteworthy point about the tenantry of Serampore was the development of what may be called a "farmer" class in connection with the class of peasant proprietors. The hereditary peasant proprietor who owned the land, and was responsible to the landlord for the rent and rates, was not always a skilled agriculturist. His land was not always of a quantity and quality in exact proportion to his resources. He might have more than he could manage, or less. There might be sickness, or loss of cattle, or he might have other work to take up his time. But he had to make the most of the land; for, law or no law, he had a rack-rent to pay, and his family to maintain out of it.

Thus it happened that any one having the necessary skill, labour, and capital at his command could generally get land on a sub-lease to employ them on. The sub-tenant, having to pay no rates, and paying for only picked fields,—being able, moreover, to give up the land when it suited him without sacrificing his house site,—could pay a higher rent to his lessor than the lessor could to the landlord.

He had also the tenant for a buffer between himself and the landlord's people, the writers, peons and others, who gleaned so close when their master had gathered in the rent—the main harvest. The basis of such a business as that of

the farmer was the securing of a house site of his own.

How had the tenant and the sub-tenant the heart to live on and work when all was at the mercy of the landlord?

The tenant's practical safety lay in the fact that he was paying a rack-rent, and if he were turned out no other was likely to pay more. It paid the landlord to keep him where he was.

The sub-tenant's safety lay in the commercial value of his skill, labour, and capital, which were too useful to frighten away.

I mention capital, which was necessary for the growing of crops like sugar-cane, potato, betel leaf, jute, and vegetables. A large outlay was needed on seed, manure, implements, and labour for these, which were the chief paying crops in that suburban region.

In spite of the want of pasture cow-keeping was, of course, another great industry. Calcutta and the river-side towns, with their million of inhabitants, were great markets for milk and milk products. The cows were for the most part kept in stalls, and fed on oilcake, chopped straw, banana stems, and such other substitutes, more or less unsatisfactory, for grass, as were available. The life was not a healthy one for the cows. Hindoos though they were, the cow-keepers seemed wonderfully indifferent to the welfare of their stock.

I remember once the rinderpest got among the cows—some sixty in number—of a large byre.

In a land where the cow was sacred, slaughter was out of the question; but I did think that the Hindoo cow-keeper, both from interest and from piety, would be willing to do what he could for them. I suggested that he should at least separate the sound from the sick. But no, they must take their chance.

“It is too much trouble,” he said, “to feed them in two lots.”

Cattle were used for ploughing, for draught, and for giving milk—never for food. Every village had its piece of waste ground where the dead bodies of cattle were laid when they died. Here the village skinner took off the hide; and the bones, after being picked clean by the vultures, crows, jackals, and dogs, were in these latter days collected and sold to the bone mill at Bally, and turned into manure.

Orchards were numerous, producing fruit of all kinds, especially mango and jack, and were mostly in the hands of the gentry—men above the peasant class.

No part of the population can be said to have been purely agricultural, so many men of all classes found a living in, or in connection with Calcutta and the river-side towns, or under Government.

I found a large class of respectable residents—gentry living on their means—in nearly all the villages. When I first went, all of them who could get away had fled from the fever epidemic. Later on, however, when it left, many of them

returned. Their presence added an element of intelligence not usually found in Indian country villages, and gave to the population of Serampore—in common, doubtless, with the rest of the sub-metropolitan area—a special character of its own.

## IX

### THE POLICE

WE had in the subdivision Government Police, town Police, railway Police, and the village watch.

The first three were organised, each under its officers; the last had no officers.

The Government Police we already know about. It was a provincial force, distributed over the Districts of the province, to any part of which any man might be moved at any time. The town Police was a force organised to take the place of the village watch in each town. It was, I think, a local force, and when I first went to Serampore the town paid for it. The railway Police were a separate force of Government Police for duty within the fences of the railway.

My education in Police matters was still at an early stage, so I propose merely to give one or two incidents as illustrating the work.

Shortly after I arrived I got a letter from the District Chief of Police, who lived at Hooghly, asking me to request the Government to remove from the list of Honorary Magistrates of Baidā-



batty the name of one of the prominent citizens of the town, on the ground that he had endeavoured by intimidation to deter the local Police sub-inspector from doing his duty.

On inquiry I discovered that a charge of dacoity, or gang robbery—a very grave offence—had been laid against a number of men, who were thereupon arrested by the sub-inspector and put in the station lock-up. One of them was the brother of the Honorary Magistrate in question, who promptly went to the sub-inspector and offered bail for his brother, which the sub-inspector refused to take, saying, quite correctly, that it was not in his power to take bail in a case of this kind.

The Honorary Magistrate angrily threatened to get him into trouble for abusing his position. It was on account of this threat that he was to be reported for removal from the list of Honorary Magistrates, which would be keenly felt as a public disgrace.

More facts came out. The man said to have been robbed was a beggar. He had been, he complained, assaulted by five men, and the property of which he had been robbed was the worthless rag he was wearing. It was a parody of a crime, rather than a crime proper, and the man had in all probability been put up to bring the charge in order to annoy respectable people.

The locking up of these young men was a

terrible disgrace to them, even if it was only for a few hours and ended in their release.

The sub-inspector had acted legally, but, if he was honest, with small discretion; and I refused to support the recommendation of the Chief of Police. I quote the case to show the great difficulties we had in handling the Police. They had to have wide discretion and great power if they were to be of any use; and that enabled them, without going beyond the law, to harass and annoy innocent people.

The work here was difficult because we were in the neighbourhood of Calcutta. During the year before I came, there had been committed in the subdivision a series of real dacoities, whose authors were a Calcutta gang. They used to mix in the day with the dock labourers; come up by rail in the evening, make their swoop, and get back to Calcutta by a boat they had waiting on the river bank. After many successful raids, they were attacked one night with a sword by a valiant village watchman, who cut down one of their number. This man gave up their names and plans; instant pursuit was organised, and the whole gang were secured as they were getting into their boat with their plunder.

By this time the real old professional dacoit of the class who infested the roads and waterways leading to Calcutta was practically extinct. The finishing blow was struck when, about a generation before, they were rounded up in gangs of fifty

or sixty, convicted of being dacoits, and sent to finish their life in the Andamans, or whatever was then the penal settlement. It is told of one notoriously desperate character that the judge, struck by his decrepit and worn appearance in the dock, was discharging him as physically unfit for action, when in the joy of the moment he most imprudently turned a back somersault from the dock, and landed on his feet outside. He was put back, and sentenced with the rest.

The only one of my sub-inspectors whom I can call to mind vividly, though I have forgotten his name, is my friend of the search, Bakáulla's pupil, already referred to. He was a good officer, if he *was* a little too much inclined to look on man as made for the Police, rather than the Police for man.

He first came to my notice in connection with a theft. He was on duty at Baidabatty railway station, when, seeing a man alight from a train with a big bundle, he suspected something wrong, and told the man to show him the contents of the bundle. The man left the bundle and bolted. My friend dashed after him, and at the cost of a fall and a barked shin, got him. The bundle was found to be full of gold and silver ornaments stolen from a pawnbroker's shop in Chandernagore, to whose authorities the thief was made over.

We had an arrangement with our French neighbours to exchange informal notices when the

extradition of a criminal was wanted. The man was then detained till the arrival of the formal papers which etiquette required to be sent round through the respective Governments of Bengal and Chandernagore.

There was no extradition of smugglers, and many were the trials of wits between the opium runners, fired by the hope of great gain, and the Police, keen on rewards. The railway station of Chandernagore was just outside French territory. One can imagine the scene on the arrival of almost any train from the north—the crowd of passengers swarming out of the station, down the stairs, under the scrutinising eye of the Police detective with his “information received”; the smuggler edging forward with his modest bundle among the rest, hoping to escape notice; the whistle, signifying that he has been seen, and the quick dash forward in the hope of escaping over the frontier, only a few steps distant, from the pounce of the policeman waiting at the foot of the steps. Sometimes the last rush is made on foot; sometimes the smuggler jumps into a cab, whose driver lashes his ponies, while the Police grab at their heads. Once the fugitive got his head over the border, and was pulled back by the legs; and once, at least, the Police followed their man over the border and dragged him back—an insult to France which was only atoned for by handing over the man and his opium to the French Police.

One cunning man, avoiding the well-watched

station at Chandernagore, got out at the station next to the south, shadowed by a midget of a detective who was too small to hold him. He strolled into Bhadreswar, meaning to find his way into French territory by a roundabout, and he hoped unsuspected way. His opium was in a wooden office box, carried quite openly on his shoulder. When they got opposite the Police station the little detective ran in and caught his man, calling for help, which came, and the man was secured.

A boat known to carry opium was boarded and searched, but nothing was found, till it occurred to some one to rake the bottom with a rope, when the opium was found slung from the bottom of the boat in waterproof tin cases.

My friend, Bakáulla's pupil, once sent up a case of gang robbery in which a lad of the gang had turned approver. I asked how he got the lad to speak.

"He is a Hindoo," was the reply, "and I am a Brahmin. I made him touch my feet, and then he had to tell the truth."

The same officer's keenness is illustrated by another small incident.

I was sitting one day in a village among the people, when there came to us a poor man wanting a leg, and asked us to get him a wooden leg. We started a subscription for the purpose, when Bakáulla's old pupil intervened with an objection.

"This man," he said, "is well known to me as

a notorious thief. He broke his leg by falling over a root while running away with stolen property." (He had been taken to a country dispensary, where the hospital assistant in charge, burning for the distinction of a major operation, cut off the leg instead of setting it.) "God in His Providence," he continued, "has graciously taken it out of his power to continue his career of crime, and shall we fly in the face of Providence, and restore to him that which God has taken away?"

Though somewhat subdued by the loftiness of his reasoning, we persevered in our impious purpose. He was only half comforted by our arguments. One was that a man with a wooden leg cannot run fast, especially at night, and the other that a thief with a wooden leg can be easily traced, first by the sound of its tapping on the ground, and second by the marks it leaves.

I think I see before me this man in his dark-blue uniform and little round cap. He was lanky, and had a very long neck, and usually walked in a peering attitude with his head well forward, and neck stretched out.

I may just mention that probably the weakest part of a Police system, which had at that time many weak points, was its staff for the prosecution of cases in Court.

## X

### THE POLICE—*Continued*

THE introduction of the Village Watch Act had been carried out in Serampore in a different way from what I had seen in Tipperah. The best way of explaining the Serampore method will be to give an account of the great Begumpore Union, whose affairs were forced on my attention shortly after I took charge.

I was sitting one morning in Court taking petitions, when one was presented by a large party of well-dressed people not of the kind usually met with in a criminal Court. It turned out to be a complaint from inhabitants of the Begumpore Village Watch Union, alleging oppression on the part of the "collecting member" of its "punchayet," or Union Board. The allegations were many and grave; and I decided that my best plan was to go to the spot and hold an investigation in presence of all concerned. So I fixed a day and sent out notices. The place was some eight miles distant by road to the west of Serampore, beyond the marshes. The Union was a group of five villages, of which Begumpore, from which it took its name.

was the largest—a section of the densely peopled belt which covers the banks of the old Saraswati river, with about 8000 inhabitants living in 1500 houses, and served by twenty-six village watchmen.

On arriving at a glade surrounded by fruit trees and bamboos, in Begumpore, we found assembled what seemed to be the whole male population of the Union—many being of a class much above the peasant.

The only person who did not appear, so far as I can recollect, was the “collecting member” himself, who evidently shirked a meeting with his indignant ratepayers.

The inquiry began, and the “collecting member” was not spared. It appears that he was an obscure man, without means of his own, living in the smallest village and most remote corner of the Union—unknown to most of the ratepayers, unscrupulous, greedy, arrogant. He had got the whole power into his own hands, and used his position to harass the ratepayers. His powers were considerable, for he could distrain property—even taking doors off their hinges.

When asked what the other members of the “punchayet” were about to allow such goings on, the objectors said that the other members were mere dummies—puppets whose strings were pulled by the “collecting member.”

It is not to be forgotten that the “punchayet” were in a very invidious position; for they had



to assess and collect a *new* tax, and there was bound to be discontent, by whatever hands that task was performed. It meant getting from the villagers a sum of over 1500 rupees in about 6000 quarterly items. The "punchayet" were not paid for the work; the "collecting member" would find it hard to do if he gave his whole time to it—impossible if he gave less.

And if the existing "punchayet" were removed, another must be provided in its place, for the work had to be done.

So far I had listened and said nothing; for I could not say anything to discredit those in charge, even if they seemed unworthy, until at least there was a prospect of getting better men.

"Why," continued the spokesman of the malcontents indignantly—"why did the Police nominate these men to rule over us when there were in the Union so many better men for the work?"

Where, I asked, were the better men?

"Here present," he said, and named many men, who showed themselves, and whose appearance and position seemed to justify the allegation.

Now I had had some experience of this work in Tipperah, and made a good guess at the reason.

"I will tell you," said I. "Is it not because these good men of yours were unwilling to take the trouble of the work, and backed out of nomination?"

The villagers had to admit that this was true.

"But," said they, "they now see the mischief we suffer from having bad men in power, and are willing to serve."

I then asked for the names of those whom the villagers wanted, and five representative men were named, in whom all present declared their confidence.

The nominees were there, and placed their services at the disposal of their neighbours. Of the five there is only one whose name I remember—Nabagopal Ghose, with whom as the "collecting member" I had afterwards much intercourse. He was a small, slender man of middle age, with a pleasant face—a man of good family and moderate means—a small freeholder, I think. He had not much to do, and nothing to take him outside the Union.

From the appearance of the men and the demeanour of the people I was satisfied that I had got the right men for the "punchayet."

Accordingly I proceeded, addressing the villagers.

"If I appoint these men, they are your men, not mine." They agreed.

"I will accept all they do as done by your wish." They agreed again enthusiastically.

"Mind," I went on, "if there is any difference between you and them, I will back them."

"Be it so," they assented. "We trust them, and have no fear."

"The work is heavy and difficult," I said.

“You must make it as easy for them as you can.”

This also they promised to do.

Then I formally set aside the old “punchayet,” and appointed the new one.

This happened shortly after my arrival. I watched the work of Nabagopal and his colleagues for nearly four years thereafter, and had no more trouble with that Union. The assessments, the collections, the payment of the twenty-six watchmen went on smoothly; and the “punchayet” was of great use to me in many other matters besides the management of the village watch.

I have dwelt on this “election” because it is a thing I am proud of. It was an experiment, so far as I am aware, at that time, and in that part of the country altogether new. As if by the touch of a fairy wand, it transformed what threatened to be a very big and nasty trouble into peace and harmony.

We could not, of course, expect to get such good results everywhere. Much of our success was owing to the great devotion and singular unselfishness of Nabagopal Ghose himself, who was a very exceptional character.

I am glad to be able to give him my humble tribute of admiration. But I am entitled to claim him and his colleagues as my “find,” and that I had hit on the way to find such men where they existed. This was not the only “find” I made in those busy hives of humanity,

which at that time no man—no man at least in official circles—seemed to regard unless some disturbance or crime or disaster occurred to draw attention to them for a day or two.

The hereditary principle was very strongly rooted in the people's mind, as the following instance will show. The "collecting member" of one of the "punchayets" having died, the surviving members and the whole Union would have nobody in his place as "collecting member" but his son, a child of twelve. Of course another possible explanation of their choice is that they may have preferred that the responsible member should be some one too young to be made answerable for the accounts. I forget if the boy was appointed, but I do not think he can have been.

It will be seen that whereas in Tipperah the work of a "punchayet" was confined to the beat of a single watchman, here it covered many beats. Begumpore Union, with its twenty-six watchmen, and a population greater than that of Kotrung town, was perhaps the largest; but there were others of almost equal importance; and large Unions were the rule, not the exception.

It is obvious that the "punchayet" which had to assess and collect 6000 items of rate from 1500 householders in the year was in a totally different position from that which had to collect 200 items from fifty householders. The latter had a small task, taking little time and trouble: the

former a task that would occupy a man's whole time. The one task would be performed by a man having intimate knowledge of those he was dealing with : he who was performing the other necessarily dealt for the most part with strangers.

The task of assessment is in these circumstances not easy, but it is child's play to the task of collecting—always an unpopular duty. While there were not wanting “punchayets” that did regularly and well their whole duty of assessing, collecting, and paying out the funds, it was more common to find two extreme types of “collecting members.” Of the first type was the good-natured man, who hated so much to use coercion that he paid a good deal of the wages out of his own pocket. Of the other was the unscrupulous sharper, indifferent to public opinion—hard-hearted, and rejoicing in the exercise of his power to coerce.

The question of remunerating the watchman was difficult. The villagers were anxious for good men, but the highest wage the law allowed would not suffice to attract the local recruit. Some “punchayets,” following the example of the town Police, imported from up-country, who were cheaper indeed, but did not know the language or the people.

The payment of wages was always a trouble. Did the watchman get his wage? Sometimes he complained that he did not. Sometimes he gave a receipt in full for more than he got.

The watchman had no very savoury reputa-

tion, for many were believed to consort with thieves. The agricultural peasantry resented the wage system.

"He is getting his wage month by month," said one. "It comes in to him all the time, and we have to find his wage at a time when we pay out, and are getting nothing."

"He is better off than we are," said another, "for he has his wage, and hires himself out as a labourer besides."

This indeed was a great evil, for he would work all day with a mason or bricklayer, often at a distance from home, out of the way if needed. A man, moreover, who has been hard at his work all day is not very fit for going his rounds by night.

But indeed the watchmen, having no officers, were not under proper discipline, and did much as they pleased.

The watchman whose remuneration was in land might be supposed to be in a better position. It is true that this was less offensive to the peasantry, and he was at all events more in the village. But even here we had difficulties. Though not entitled to do so, he would mortgage his land or his crop, or would exchange his good land for some one else's bad—for a consideration. And then, if there was drought and the crops failed, he starved.

Ever since its institution the provincial Police department had been desirous of getting control

over the village watchmen, being little less jealous of their management by the village elders than the Government had been of their management by the landlords. To the best of my belief, this question of control has not yet been settled, though the tendency has been to place them for discipline and duty more and more under the orders of the Government Police. But to this day the men are not transferable, and have no officers.

When the village watch was superseded in Kotrung and other towns by the "town Police," the new force was made up of men under close discipline, and they had their officers. Compare Kotrung, with its drilled men living in barracks and under its officers (one for every six men), and Begumpore Union, a much larger community, with its twenty-six men scattered about in their own homes, having no officers, and doing much as they pleased.

It has always seemed to me that the department, when desiring to add the thousands of village watchmen without officers to the charges of their already overworked station officers, have not considered sufficiently the impossibility of the situation that would be created.

When our English system was reformed, a homogeneous force, officered throughout, was created.

There is, again, the question of finance. The towns, like the villages, originally paid for their watch, and were for a time made to pay for the

town Police, which did duty for it. But the Government relieved them of the charge, while the villages had still to bear the burden. Is there any good defence for thus favouring with subsidies the towns, presumably richer and better able to afford the cost, while leaving the burden on the poorer villages? It is hardly a good answer to say that this is really a gift for sanitary purposes. Our Government prides itself on being a steward for the villages as well as the towns, and it is bad stewardship to hand over money which belongs to the villages for removing evils in the towns, where they are more apparent to the official eye, leaving to fester on unremedied the no less real evils in the villages.

Yes, the question of the village watch was full of unsolved difficulties. Many of them are still unsolved.



## XI

### ROADS

I LEARNT much about roads in Serampore.

It was the town roads that I had first to think of, since each of my five towns was required by law to keep up its roads, and we were often at our wits' end for the means to do so.

As the necessity for these town roads was admitted by all, I shall pass from them with the following observations :—

The importance of the town roads in the eyes of the Government is proved by the fact that their upkeep was enforced on the town by law.

The law forbade any part of the town funds to be spent outside the town's limits.

Even within those limits complaints were at once made if any quarter seemed to be getting more or less than its proper share.

As the roads improved, people became more particular. Those who would once have waded contentedly through a quagmire now complained of a puddle. This shows that the so-called contentment of Indians with bad roads is not con-

tentment, but resignation to the inevitable, for it ceases when and where bad roads cease to be inevitable.

In the roads outside the towns I had a four-fold interest. As a member of the District Road Committee, as president of its Serampore subdivisional branch, as District Official, and as trustee for the people of my subdivision. I had thus to regard our work from four distinct stand-points, of which in the end the fourth came to hold in my eyes overwhelming importance.

But was not the District Committee acting as trustee for the people? No; and to understand its attitude we have to look at its origin.

The occasion which brought about the passing of the Road Cess Act was the Orissa famine; the cause, which that occasion disclosed, was the neglect of the landlords. The particular thing which they neglected was to provide a proper system of roads for the transport of food to the people in case of famine. The Road Cess Act was intended, when passed, to scourge the people—landlords and tenants—into doing their duty,—justly, as the Government held; unjustly, as they contended.

It was only to be extended to Districts where the system of roads was not satisfactory for a famine emergency.

One District Officer, being asked what roads his District needed, replied that it needed none. Another, when his roads were made, fenced them

and prevented carts from using them, thus showing that in his opinion they were not meant for traffic. My old chief in Tipperah regarded metal-ling as a work not justified by the Act. And the general feeling was, that when the system of roads according to the sanctioned scheme was completed, the rate would be reduced, or perhaps abolished. The question of maintenance, which in any commercial system of roads would be the chief question, was hardly thought of.

There could hardly have been a more complete contrast of conditions than that between Tipperah and Serampore. It must have been quite a year, or even more, before I got to understand our position. The Hooghly Board, unlike that in Tipperah, had inherited a system, for a beginning had been made by the "Ferry Fund" Committee, which administered a fund raised, as its title denotes, from tolls on ferries. The Committee found three important roads existing in the subdivision. One of these, the Grand Trunk Road, maintained by Government, lay wholly within the towns. The other two were the old Benares Road, starting from Howrah, and passing north-west out across the Damoodar river; and the Tarkeshwar Road, starting from the Hooghly bank north of Serampore, and running due west to meet the old Benares Road.

This Tarkeshwar Road played a very important part in the discussions of our Committee. When the Committee took it over, it was being main-

tained by means of a toll on the traffic using it, and had been metalled for about ten miles. The District Officer, and indeed the Government also, having conscientious objections to the levy of tolls on traffic in a District where there was a rate, had abolished the tolls; and the District fund was thus saddled with the maintenance of a ten-mile long metalled road—a burden which my Tipperah chief had objected to lay on his fund. It is to be borne in mind that this was a densely peopled submetropolitan area, with a string of railway stations and large markets along its eastern edge; and traffic developed enormously on the slightest encouragement. There are now serving the area on the lines of the Tarkeshwar Road and the old Benares Road two railways. The Committee, far from dismantling the metal of the Tarkeshwar Road, undertook not only to maintain that, but to metal at the cost of its fund a number of other roads, chiefly railway feeders.

It seems to me that in adopting this policy the Committee did not sufficiently reflect that a metalled road does not last for ever. As a matter of fact, our metalled roads if made of broken brick had to be renewed once in four years; if of stone, once in eight; and, as stone metal cost double as much as brick metal, the cost of maintenance came to much the same in either case.

When I first joined it, the Committee had already got into difficulties about funds. Every penny was required for making good the wear

and tear on our existing metalled roads, which were yet neither wide enough nor long enough, nor properly kept up; and for giving an occasional scrape to our mud roads, which were deep dust in dry weather and deep mud in wet. We could not afford to make a single new road of any kind. The roads we had had been made on a calculation that when they were done other parts of the District would get attended to in turn. But it was evident that the turn of the other roads would never come, for our whole fund was being devoured for the maintenance of our existing roads, on which much more could have been used had it been available.

The Road Cess Act also contained provision for allotment of funds for "village roads." Who that was a member of the Hooghly Committee in those days will forget the persistence with which Joykissen Mookerjea dinned "village roads" into our ears, in season and out of season? In vain it was put to him that it was far better to concentrate our funds on a few important roads, which were useful to the whole District, than to fritter them away in useless subsidies to a multitude of village lanes of no general importance. He stuck to his guns, and reproached the Committee with its neglect of this important part of its duty.

Meantime, in another capacity—as Chairman of the Branch Committee, I had to attend to the administration of such doles as we got from the District Committee for these same "village roads."

We had, in the first place, to make up our minds what was meant by a village road. Let us take a case—that of the Begumpore Union. The best way of approaching it was from Serampore, by a road metalled for about three miles with broken brick, over the end of which you tumbled into a slough.

A little way beyond this point a mud track, about eight feet wide, with fences on both sides for most of the way, unbridged, rutty and rough, takes off on the left, and along this we go for some three miles, through houses and gardens nearly all the way, till we get to Begumpore.

Begumpore Union is larger than, and as densely peopled as Kotrung town, and has, like Kotrung, its streets or lanes. On the approach to Begumpore and on its lanes we could easily have spent our whole allotment for village roads. If the streets of Kotrung were so important that the law required them to be kept up, for the same reasons the lanes of Begumpore were also important, and it was paying its road rate.

But it was one of a hundred areas, all of whose needs we had to consider, and many of them worse off. For Begumpore was, at all events, within a few miles of a metalled road, while most of the other villages were not near any District road of any kind.

We did what we could, though it was little, giving a preference to those who tried to help themselves.

"Show me," I used to say when a party of villagers would try to excite my compassion with their bad roads, as a beggar does by showing his sores—"Show me a good road worth looking at, and I will help you to keep it right."

As officials we were chiefly interested in having a road practicable at all seasons of the year connecting the Police stations with headquarters. This was quite consistent with the general welfare, since the stations were all at important points. We had roads of a sort to all of them ; or perhaps, to put it otherwise, we took care to have them where roads were.

I found my position in these various capacities perplexing enough. When talking to a townsman, I had to fire his zeal for improving his town roads, finding fault with him, urging him to spend more money on them, dwelling on the fact that not a penny of his rates was spent on roads outside the town. We spent considerable sums on our town streets, but never enough to keep them in order ; and my mission here was to arouse that "divine discontent" which is the great instrument of improvement.

But when talking to a villager, I had to do the exact opposite.

"What has become of the rate I have paid ?" he would ask.

The first impulse of the official is to prove that the money has been honestly spent and not embezzled. So I would recapitulate the works

it had gone into—the embankment, the bridging, the metalling, the repairs of this or that main road. “But none of these is any good to me,” the Begumpore man would say, “when I can’t get at them.”

“They are works of use to the whole District, including yourselves,” I would argue. “If you had not the main roads of what use would your village lanes be to you?”

“But I prefer to have my money spent on my own lanes,” he would answer.

Sound doctrine in Kotrung, but in Begumpore, across the marshes, rank heresy!

We prided ourselves on giving an occasional dole.

“See,” I said to one small landowner, “we have helped to improve that road in your neighbourhood.”

“Yes,” he answered, “and ruined my market, for your road has taken all the trade to its rival.”

“Behold,” I said to another man, “this fine metalled road—the Tarkeshwar Road—leading direct to the great river-side market. Call you that nothing?”

“What is the good of it to me,” he asked, “when I have to wade up to the neck to reach it?”

I was encamped at a point within a few hundred yards of this Tarkeshwar Road, and found some men loading a cart with potatoes for the river-side market. I asked what load they were putting on. They said twelve maunds (about 9 cwts.).



"But will not the cart carry a heavier load," I asked, "on the metalled road?"

"Yes," they said, "but there is the rough part to get over between."

"Could you not carry the sacks that short distance?" I asked.

"It's not worth our while," was the reply.

On another occasion some villagers came with a grievance. They had got together, and made a road at their own expense, but no sooner was it made than outsiders used it.

"Can't we," they asked, "make them pay for using it? It is not fair, when we have been at the trouble and expense of making the road, that they who did nothing should hash it to pieces with their carts."

As the law allowed them neither to charge for the use of their road nor to keep these outsiders off it, I had to utter some platitudes on the beauty of free and unrestricted traffic, and change the conversation as quickly as I could.

## XII

### ROADS—*Continued*

LET me describe this little world of villages through which I wandered for several years.

Land and sea. The village sites, with their houses, gardens, orchards, and fields of sugar-cane, potato, betel leaf, jute and vegetables, stood like the land in islands or coast lines, and the open rice fields enclosed them like the sea. The difference was one of water; for the former were above, the latter below flood level.

The land above flood level was scarce and valuable. The land below it was fully occupied with rice fields. There was practically no waste land. Even the village commons,—the grazing ground and the roads—had almost entirely disappeared.

The rice fields were deep with mud and covered with crop in the rains. After the autumn harvest they were bare stubble, hard and open. By the help of cuts through the boundary ridges of the fields, they could then be traversed by carts.

In the village site, the homesteads and the fields of special crop were almost all fenced. The paths, where they existed, were tortuous and narrow.

Being as often as not the village drains, they were during the rainy season deep in mud poached with the feet of cattle. Houses jostled one another—disputes over rights of way were incessant. During the rainy season, in the absence of the narrow, rutty, muddy track which was occasionally found doing duty for a road, the only outlet for the people of the village was by a narrow, slippery boundary ridge between fields knee deep in mud, interrupted at intervals by a slough. Mud, mud everywhere, and no room !

During the rains the cattle could not be let into the fields. Carts had to be laid up. Even on the main roads off the metal, carriages could not be taken, so thick was the mud. I have known of bullock-carts going over them, but only with light loads, sometimes as little as five maunds ( $3\frac{1}{2}$  cwts.), which, when a stiff bit had to be crossed, was taken off and lifted over. The only means of transport for ladies was the hand-litter, and for goods the pack-pony or bullock, or the human head.

There was no room to walk about ; there were no lights at night. It was most difficult to get the cattle out of and into the homesteads, or for the women to get to the bathing-place or the drinking-water tank and back, or to fetch the medical man in case of sickness, or to send the children to school, or—but are not roads needed on every hand for every purpose ? To mention only one point more—whereas in Tipperah the rainy season—the time of high prices—was the best time for sending away

produce, because there they had boat transport, here everything had to be got away in the dry season before the rains—the time of low prices—because for want of roads the cost of transport was prohibitive in the rains.<sup>1</sup> This alone was a cause of heavy loss to the cultivator.

These villages, thus deprived of one of the elementary aids to comfort and profit, were not rude little hamlets inhabited by boors and savages, but were large enough to deserve the name of towns, and many of their inhabitants were of good position. Their people were accustomed to visit the towns near by, and knew what a different standard existed there. They knew that every penny the townsman paid in rates was used within the town; and much soreness was felt in the villages at the difference between the treatment meted out to the town-villages and that considered fitting for the village-towns.

I need hardly say that all this gave food for thought. Everything all round seemed to be wrong. All the rest had been sacrificed for the main roads, yet we had not all the main roads we needed, and those we had were bad. We had practically no feeder roads. Village lanes were left to take care of themselves.

The Branch Committee, over which I presided, resolved to do what it could towards providing connection for villages with the main roads, regarding their interior lanes as quite beyond its

<sup>1</sup> See page 39.

resources. Its function was to attend to "village roads," but we defined "village roads" as including all roads that were not on the books of the District Committee. Our funds were small; we had no prospect of getting a larger grant from the District Committee; and our feeders would be expensive. How were we to manage?

The only chance was that the people interested should lend a hand. It was true that they had a certain claim on the rates; but that claim had been repeatedly made and rejected. The villagers had given up hope in that quarter; and I did what I could to push the argument that it was better for them to pay something and get their road than to go without it, even if they paid nothing.

I had a double inducement to offer.

In the first place, if the people of a neighbourhood came forward with a good scheme and an offer of substantial support to it, we were prepared to meet them with a grant from our funds. In the second place, I was ready to give my good offices in arranging for the necessary land. If the promoters were left to their own resources, local jealousies were sure to prevent their arranging with all those interested; but if some one of standing enough spoke, people were wonderfully willing. It was a matter for diplomacy. We would not look at a scheme if it involved the acquisition of the land at public expense. We could not afford it.

As a specimen of the spirit to be dealt with, I

quote a dialogue I had with one man who had been objecting to give up a bit of land.

*I.* "They say that you are unwilling to help with land. Are you going to make the whole thing stick for the sake of a little land?"

*He.* "I am willing to give it when you ask, but not for so-and-so. I spit at him, but I'll do it for you."

Mahomedans (he was, I think, a Mahomedan) are very violent in their quarrels. Though he would not do the other's bidding he would not let the other outdo him in public spirit.

We had so many schemes offering that it was quite a favour to give our support to any one, and we could generally get the terms we asked for. Land was given willingly, if it was for a road. In only one case had I any trouble, and that I feel sure was because the land in question was just outside my subdivision. Subscriptions of money also were most liberal, and we made many good feeders.

But the District Committee continued deaf to all that we could say. There was one road, connecting two District roads, and of obvious importance—an earthen one, and therefore not costly to maintain, which we embanked and bridged, and offered to the District Committee for maintenance. The Committee refused it, "not being able to afford the cost of maintenance."

But though we accomplished something, all that we could do gave little hope of permanent improvement. That could only be got from the

District Committee. What was wanted was a change of system.

The fact was that the Committee had muddled up two objects—one being supply of a system of ways for transport in time of famine, and the other the provision of a system of roads for the use of the public.

In theory the wants of the villagers were recognised, provision being made for their roads: in practice those wants were ignored; for the provision made was so small as to be worse than useless, provoking jealousy and bad blood, and killing the spirit of self-help, without doing substantial good anywhere.

What was to be done?

One thing was clear. For good or for evil we had embarked on a policy of providing accommodation for traffic in ordinary times, and must go on with it. We could not fence our roads, as one District Officer had done, and keep the traffic off them.

Our system of main roads without feeders was, from the villagers' point of view, a ludicrous one—like a tree all stem, with no branches or leaves, or a human body with veins and arteries in the legs and arms, and none in the hands and feet.

For the villager the important roads were those round his home, that he used daily and for all purposes, rather than the distant roads, which he seldom used and could not reach.

Even if the system was dictated by the law, there was a case for a change in the law.

I examined the problem from the point of view of the villagers, which, as said above, had come to hold in my mind overwhelming importance. It was clear that the law for the town-villages and that for the village-towns must be reconciled. Both could not be right. If it was right to require that every penny of the Kotrung rates spent on roads should be spent within the limits of Kotrung, it was equally right that the same restriction should be placed on the rates of the Begumpore Union, the Bora Union, the Haripal Union, and the hundreds of other villages that lay between Hooghly and Damoodar.

Certain it was that the law would never be changed to enable the rates of Kotrung to be taken for the Tarkeshwar Road, or even for the roads of Serampore or Uttarpara.

Then the law must be altered so as to give to Begumpore its own rates for its own roads.

There were two difficulties to be got over. The first was the famine programme. It was for this that the Committee had been appointed, and of course any change could only take effect subject to its being completed. The scheme was to *make* roads, but not to *maintain* them in any particular way.

The second difficulty was the maintenance of open roads.

Now what in that way could our funds do? One of the evils of not regulating expenditure of the fund by income from the rates was that



many ratepayers had extravagant ideas of what their rates could do, paying a shilling, and expecting for it a pound's worth of work.

The rate produced about 100 rupees to the square mile—just enough to keep up two miles of unmetalled road for every square mile of country. If spread over the district so as approximately to be spent where raised it would give a system of unmetalled main roads, and feeders to all the villages—not a very grand service, but at all events fairly rendered to those who paid the rates.

Two things it would not give—village lanes at one end and metalled roads at the other. It seemed to me, however, that if the proceeds of the rate were fairly spent for the benefit of those who paid them, *and the villagers were satisfied of this*, the people of the more crowded, larger, and wealthier villages, where the want of better village lanes was most felt, would be more willing to put their hands in their pockets and supply the want than if, as now, they felt that they were not getting the return they were entitled to for the rates they had paid.

There remained the metalled roads.

It was reckoned that a metalled road cost about 1000 rupees per mile per annum to maintain ; 4000 every four years for brick ; 8000 every eight years for stone.

This was just the entire proceeds of the road cess of ten square miles for every mile of road. The ten miles of the Tarkeshwar Road absorbed

the rate of 100 square miles ; and the whole rate of the subdivision would do little more than support about thirty-five miles. This would leave nothing for famine scheme, feeders, or village roads. Our metalled roads had no proper feeders. Each of them ended prematurely in a slough ; and they were always out of order. When money was asked for their repairs, the Committee used to cut down the estimates.

I came to the conclusion that with a fund raised as ours was, and limited in amount, metalled roads were a mistake. They were good things in themselves, but we could not afford them.

What then ? Must the Committee be asked to dismantle them ?

No, not if it could possibly be helped. We wanted more and better metalled roads, not to get rid of those we had.

To make the story short, I determined to ask the Committee to retain the metalled roads, but to make the traffic using a road pay for its upkeep by means of a toll—reverting to the system on which the Tarkeshwar Road was started. The proceeds of the toll I proposed to use entirely for the upkeep and improvement of the road on which it was paid. There was a good deal of discussion over this matter. Finally I moved my proposal, which was seconded by Baboo Joykissen Mookerjea, and, I think, carried unanimously. But it got no further. The Government vetoed it as unorthodox ; and neither that nor any other mode

of relief was, so far as I know, ever given. The higher authorities seemed to be of the opinion of Molière's physician, that it is better to die keeping the rules than to be cured by unorthodox treatment.

It is no part of the plan of this book to reproduce the arguments for or against this or other proposals. It is meant merely to give the facts that led to them.

So far as this book is concerned, the reader will approve or condemn as may seem good to him.

## XIII

### SANITATION

IF sanitation means life and health, our little world of towns and villages was in the possession of the enemy ; for death and disease reigned there.

For years the Burdwan fever had swept away its tens, and enfeebled its hundreds of thousands. Cholera was endemic. These and the many kindred diseases had got a firm grip of both villages and towns.

Men said that not many years before the District had been healthy, and that the chief cause of the change was bad water. In days of old the Damoodar used to pour her floods over the land, washing it clean, and filling it up with sweet water. At that time the land was healthy, but the crops suffered. To save their crops, single landlords surrounded their villages with rings of embankment. Then the larger project was carried out of building an embankment all along the eastern side of the Damoodar, and the floods washed the land no more. Of the channels whereby they had issued some remained as drains for local rainfall ; others were cut up into fish

and irrigation ponds by cross dams, or even obliterated into rice fields.

Rich crops grew and were safely harvested; rents rose; population swarmed—and then came the fever.

I came to Serampore at the end of the epidemic. What impressed me most was the sight of whole villages on the banks of one of the “blind” rivers, as those cut-off channels were called, whose inhabitants had died or fled—not a house occupied; all gone to ruin, smothered in jungle.

The epidemic had by this time exhausted itself. Only in one village of the subdivision it was still active—a village that had originally stood outside the great Damoodar embankment, washed by the annual floods, on a high mound honeycombed with deep pits, on whose edges the houses were built. At that time it was healthy.

For some reason the line of the embankment was changed, so that it came between the village and the river. Then came the fever.

I examined the village and found the pits full of filthy, corrupt water. Thinking that the stoppage of the annual wash and the consequent filth in the pits might have caused the fever, I had ventilation drains, connecting pit with pit, dug right through the village mound in the direction of the prevailing wind.

I afterwards heard that the fever had stopped, though the stirring up of so much filth had brought on an outbreak of cholera,

Scientific experts may be disposed to smile at the efforts of an ignorant amateur to solve a problem so obscure; and even condemn this rash meddling with a matter so grave—a matter of life and death. Indeed it would have been a relief to hand over this terribly anxious case—a whole village stricken with fever—to a competent expert, but expert there was none within reach.

The choice was between amateur and nobody. The amateur did what he could. It was better to risk a mistake than to “pass by on the other side.” Action at least proved sympathy.

A work had been started to give back to the District some of the water which the embankment had cut off. This, the “Eden canal,” drew from the Damoodar a stream which was to pass through one of the “blind” rivers into the old channel of the Saraswati, bringing to the villages along that line a supply of wholesome drinking water. What seemed to interest the landlords still more was that it was hoped to have some to spare for irrigation.

Of course this was no substitute as a sanatory agent for the great floods that had in old times washed the land like a sea. These, however, the authorities dared not let in again, for if they would have brought health they would also, as on the west bank of the Damoodar, where the embankment had been removed, have brought desolation.

I was encamped with my District Officer on the bank of the “blind” river when the first of the new

stream came down. Inspired by our example, the people dammed the stream, cut a passage into an adjoining tank, and conveyed to it some of the new water.

I fear that in this case our zeal was greater than our discretion. There was a vast accumulation of filth to be washed out of the "blind" river before it would make a fitting channel for clean water; and doubt arose in our minds later on whether the water we had put into the tank was any better than what was there before.

There was one comfort: it could not be worse, and we had increased the quantity.

This Damoodar embankment prevented the free course of floods. Within the District there were other obstructions to the passage of water. Some were the result of carelessness, or a wish to economise. It was found, for example, when the Eden canal was being arranged for, that in the embankments of the Tarkeshwar and other roads no proper openings had been provided for the passage of the Saraswati river. The obstructions were, however, for the most part, set up in connection with agriculture. Some of them were embankments designed to keep back local water from the low lying villages, but the greater part were for irrigation purposes.

Wherever there was a stream of running water (and there was, even in that flat country, cut off from the Damoodar, some local drainage) the people on the banks would attempt to establish

anicuts and divert the water into their own land. A succession of these obstructions had the effect of checking the current, and diminishing the flow of the water.

Water was dreaded in flood time, and eagerly sought after in times of drought. A large part of our litigation was caused by the efforts of those interested now to make, and now to close openings for its passage, according as they wanted to get rid of it or to keep it. Some of the old channels, as has been said, were turned into fish ponds, or even into rice fields. I remember tracing the course of one by a slight line of depression across the rice fields. One would not have recognised it for an old waterway, but a great bridge had been provided in the old Benares Road to pass the water in flood time.

There were large marshes at the back of Howrah and Serampore, schemes for whose drainage had been carried out. The cost was assessed on the landowners, who were expected to recoup themselves from the produce of the land reclaimed. The drainage canals passed into the river Hooghly, whose water at high tide was kept out by means of sluice gates.

There are in this part of Bengal no wells or springs. Apart from the rivers, canals, and running streams, the people depend for their water on tanks—artificial reservoirs dug out of the soil, the spoil forming banks. Tanks are dug for various purposes—for irrigation, for drinking water, for fish,



and for the orchards which are frequently planted on the banks.

To dig a tank is a work of great merit. Unfortunately, however, when a tank is repaired the merit goes, not to him who has repaired, but to the original excavator. Sooner, therefore, than repair an old tank the philanthropic villager will dig a new one, to which he can give his name. And thus we see many noble old tanks lying desolate, silted up with mud, or choked with decayed vegetation. One cause of this sentiment, no doubt, is the joint family system. An old property is sure to have many owners; and any attempt to touch it, even for its improvement, is a signal for squabbling and litigation, things which a business man abhors.

From a drinking-water point of view, agriculture was one of our foes. When there was drought—the time when drinking water was most likely to fail—there was usually an emptying of all the tanks into the fields to save as much of the crop as was possible. Fish were left high and dry; drinking water was exhausted. Rain might fill the tanks later on: the crops must have water *now* or perish.

The people had known all along that water might be needed; but till it was needed they took no care about having it ready. Then the need came, and they seized on what they could get. It was their way.

Nothing was allowed to keep the water from the fields. The public roads were cut in hundreds

of places, wherever there was water on one side and crop on the other ; and there was much baling from low level ponds or streams into high level fields.

We had to keep a watch not only on the taking away of drinking water, but also on its pollution. It may have been owing to that curious idea so prevalent among them that water, the great purifier, cannot itself be polluted by anything, that people seemed indifferent to the need of keeping their water clean. All sorts of objectionable matter went into it. Every year the trees around showered leaves into the tank, there to decay. Around the houses and on the roads garbage and refuse lay scattered till the rain washed them away, and it washed them as often as not into the tank. Men and animals waded in it, bathed in it, wallowed in it, and people washed their dirty clothes in it. Bamboos and logs were left in it to season ; and—chief nuisance of all—jute was steeped in it.

Jute was here the chief crop above flood level. The plant when cut has, like flax, to be steeped that the fibre may be loosened for stripping ; and a good deal of the quality depends on the cleanliness of the water used. When a peasant saw a sheet of nice clear water his first thought was—“ What a fine place for my jute ! ”

When the Eden canal filled up the Saraswati with clean water, there was a joyful rush with bundles of jute to heave into the stream, and we

had the greatest difficulty in saving our precious (and costly) stream from destruction.

In the towns the chief supply of drinking water was from the Hooghly river, whose quarter-of-a-mile-wide stream defied pollution. The chief danger was from dead bodies.

The Hooghly was a holy river, and multitudes of pious Hindoos were brought to die on the banks. Their bodies were supposed to be cremated; but, unless carefully watched, the relations, if poor and averse to using much fuel, would be apt, after giving the body the touch of fire that ceremony required, to throw it unconsumed into the river.

Of course there were orders against this, and it was punished when proved. But it is one thing to forbid a thing, another to stop it.

In this tidal river the dead bodies floating up and down with the stream were a nuisance and a danger to health—though not so much as in old times, when, as a sailor friend once told me, you had to push a dead body away with a pole before dipping out a bucket of water to drink. If that was true, no wonder the port had a bad name for health!

The municipalities also set apart drinking-water tanks, fenced and guarded, and sacred from the washing of clothes and from bathing.

By the kindness of the managers, the tanks of Serampore used to be filled with the clean water discharged from the boilers of the jute mills.

Our great trouble was the apparent disbelief of the people in the need of precautions. I am sure our own servants used to think all our boiling and filtering nothing but a fad.

In two houses of a certain village there was once an outbreak of cholera, and I went to inquire into the cause. There was a tank of good drinking water some distance off, where the women were supposed to get their supply. In one of the two houses, however, they were taking their water for cooking from the stagnant and decayed rice swamps at the back of the house, in which also they had washed the clothes of those who had died of cholera. The women of the other house were doing the same, except that they took their cooking water from, and washed the cholera-tainted clothes in, a slimy little pond.

In the towns we attempted, so far as our slender means allowed, to do something in the way of drainage and the removal of filth and rubbish. Only one great drainage scheme was talked of in my time. It was for Serampore town, and did not get beyond the stage of discussion while I was there. It has since, I believe, been carried out. All our drains were open, and most of our municipal work consisted in keeping them clear of obstruction, and in removing filth from roads and private premises.

Conservancy in the villages had to take its chance. Drains, roads, the removal of rubbish received little or no attention. We had to feel

our way in the matter of sanitation, for we had practically no experts; and the zenana system would have prevented our experts, if we had had them, from inspecting the interior of those great rabbit-warrens of family houses that were in most need of inspection.

A little episode in the story of the feuds of the Gossains comes into my mind. Their houses adjoin one another, with a partition wall between. The people of one house one day led a sub-inspector of Police up through their house to the flat roof, and pointed out to him a nuisance on the flat roof of the other. Having made his note, the sub-inspector was for going back, but the people who had let him up said they would not let him down, saying it was only fair that he should come down through the other house: while the people of the other house did not see why they should let him down, since they had not taken him up. I forget how the matter ended.

Bengal's one Sanitary Commissioner used to go about making suggestions which were seldom attended to, save near cantonments.

Serampore's one Government Doctor, fully occupied with the mills, hospital, patients, and town work he had to attend to, seldom saw the villages, save on one of his rare and hasty visits of inspection to a country dispensary, or when sent for by some rich invalid *in extremis*.

In the towns we had one or two qualified medical men, whose hands were full of private

practice. It did not pay such men to settle in the villages, where it was so difficult to move about, and where the fatalist Indian grudged their fees.

“Either the patient will live, or he will die,” he would argue. “In either case, why waste money?”

“Doctors,” of the kind already described—ignorant quacks—abounded in towns and villages alike. The medical attendants ordinarily employed by the people were the “Kabiraj”—the hereditary physician—who, if without a diploma, inherited a good stock of experience, and the “Dai,” or nurse-midwife.

Against rabies, which, owing to its being rife among both masterless dogs and jackals, was a real danger, our simple precaution was to send out bands of Domes (the caste of Hindoos who dispose of dead bodies) in the hot months with clubs to slay stray dogs. Yet even to that there were objections.

“Slay them by all means,” said a deputation of townsfolk—“slay them; but not unless you also kill the jackals, from which they protect us.”

But the jackals were too well hidden to get at in the daytime.

Against snakes, another very real danger, we warned the villagers to guard themselves by clearing away all the jungle near their houses—advice which met with the usual fate of advice. We also gave rewards for poisonous snakes, which men

turned out of pots on the ground every day before a responsible officer, who had the species identified and the snakes destroyed, and then paid the reward. Whole families of tiny creatures just born would be brought, until at last we began to suspect that a new trade was springing up—the breeding of snakes for reward. All that we paid for seemed to make little difference in the number of snakes; and at last the practice of giving rewards was dropped. It came to be recognised that a man is just as likely if he casually meets a snake to kill it for his own sake as for the sake of a reward.

Our efforts at recording vital statistics did not, especially in the rural Districts, meet with sufficient success to make the information of any use. In response to a Government circular drawing special attention to the need of improving this part of our work, I devised a plan, printed forms, and started work experimentally in several Unions, of which Begumpore was one.

After a year's trial, finding the plan had worked well, I reported on it to Government. I explained that it was meant for rural places whose population does not shift like that of the towns, and appended some simple rules for working it.

The first notice I got was a refusal to pay my modest printer's bill. The next was a deluge of letters from hard-worked officials asking what they were meant to do with this form. I then learnt that the Government had printed several millions (I think) of the form, and sent copies to almost

every officer in the province except myself, with orders to introduce the plan in the *towns*; and no copies of my instructions had been issued.

The atmosphere of the great Calcutta offices was not wholesome for new ideas. The clerks breathed on this plant that I had been tending for a year with so much love and pride, and it withered away.

Of course I was obliged to drop the work, and my plan went into the waste-paper basket. When the Sanitary Commissioner informed me of this three years later, I told him how sore I felt, and that the department could not have managed better if their object had been to kill my zeal.

To tell the truth, even when, as in this case, they were sent on the invitation of Government itself, plans for improvement were not made welcome up there. They gave trouble to the clerks and had to be discouraged.

Our great statistical inquiry when I was at Serampore was the Census of 1881, the only Census, as it happened, that I was ever engaged in; for I was on leave during those of 1891 and 1901.

We had to get, for this subdivision alone, about a thousand educated men to act as volunteer enumerators—unpaid—and to organise them under their circle officers and charge superintendents, to none of whom any special allowance was given. Even for such necessities as materials for marking the numbers on houses, allowances were grudged.



The Census of 1881 was the first to be done all over India (except in one or two backward areas) in one night. To make this possible lists were prepared beforehand, for each house, of the names and particulars of all inmates. The names of any not entered in the list who were found in the house on the night of the Census were to be filled in; and those of any in the list who were not found were to be cancelled, as they would be entered in the house where they were.

A strange rumour arose out of this. The word used for to "cancel" in the Bengali instructions was a word meaning "to cut," and it was widely believed to be the order that all who were out of doors that night should have their heads cut off!

Many men, especially of the labouring classes, took fright and bolted—and never within the memory of man had the streets of Serampore been so empty as on that night of the full moon in March 1881.

This Census was followed by a very instructive example of the working of "Government by departments." We had no special staff for the work, which was a *tour de force*.

On the authority of a Government circular order, we had dropped everything else to make it a success.

As we reflected with some complacency, when the work was done, it *was* a success. We looked to get a reasonable time for bringing up our arrears.

But the 31st March was the last day of the official year, when the offices like to have everything in order. So on the morrow of the Census a second circular was received—issued, let us hope, in ignorance of the former one—to say that the Census would *not* be accepted as an excuse for arrears.

We had been forced into arrears, and were now to be blamed for them. It made one think of Pharaoh's taskmasters and the hard-driven children of Israel!

## XIV

### CHAOS

I SPENT four years going in and out among my people in this little world of Serampore—at headquarters in the summer ; on tour in the winter.

I remember making, in my tour diary, an entry in the following words :

“It seems to me that we are governing over the heads of the people.”

All through my ordinary work I kept feeling for a way. How could we get down among the people, instead of governing over their heads ?

My people and I became good friends. I was much impressed with their readiness to co-operate in any useful work that I put before them. This, I think, was because I was careful only to take up schemes that they really wanted, and was ready to drop a scheme the moment I found it was not to their mind. I tried to please them by taking a little trouble—going out of my way to look at a road, or a tank, or whatever they wished to show me. In short, we were as close friends as one man can be with three hundred thousand.

Ay, there was the rub ! Sixty thousand house-

holds ! How could I possibly keep in touch with them !

My routine work was against it, leaving little time or energy for the additional effort of reaching out to the people.

The numbers were against it. How was one man to keep up friendship with so many ? He could not even show himself to all of them once a year.

Distances were against it—the miles on the map, made longer by the want of proper roads.

My horizon was limited. I felt like a man wandering about with a dim lantern in the dark. Immediately around me, where I was, at the time I was there, I could see ; but all beyond was obscurity. When I shifted my ground, obscurity covered the spot I had left. I could see and hear so little with my own ears and eyes !

And I could do so little. It was easy to go to a place and be vigorous, punishing this act of oppression, and putting down that abuse ; but I had always to pass on and abandon control of the sequel.

I was among a people pliant but persistent, who would yield to the storm and spring up again when it was past. They regarded a visit from me as one of those great storms or earthquakes which cannot be fought with, but whose consequences, as they do not last long or come often, can be repaired.

I could not even be sure when I punished that

I was not hitting the oppressed instead of the oppressor. The tyrant commands the sources of evidence. Witnesses could not depend on me for protection if they offended him by their evidence : I was here to-day, and away to-morrow, and might never come back. Everybody knew that Government officers were often transferred ; and when that happened, the past was too often wiped from the official slate.

My only satisfaction was to have shown to the people my mind and the mind of the Government, to have laid before them a standard of right and wrong, and to have, amid the intriguing factions that wrangled and tore at each other in every village, started a new faction of order. And this idea of a faction of order attracted me greatly.

I could not grasp the villages ; but I got near enough to see that there was chaos in them, and that there was urgent need for order.

The time was a critical one in the history, not only of my subdivision, but of all Bengal. Lord Cornwallis' plan of trusting the landlord as a local authority had, after a trial of seventy years, been abandoned. The new Government had been engaged, since it first began, with measures for the destruction of the landlord's power over the tenant.

The first measure was the Rent Act of 1859, designed to place the tenants on their feet and protect them from arbitrary exactions. It was

followed in 1860 by the Police Act, which transferred the Police powers, hitherto exercised by the landlords, to Government officers. After an interval, the village watch, hitherto the landlord's servants, were withdrawn from his service and placed under independent control. After the Orissa famine public bodies were appointed to administer the roads, which had hitherto been under his management, and the landlord was compelled to provide funds for the purpose.

All this was destructive of the old authority of the landlord, which had so long stood without a rival in the villages. So far very little was being put in its place.

The District Road Committees and their subdivisional branches were not, in the proper sense of the word, local. They were, in fact, the District and subdivisional officers hampered by committees. My Branch Committee did not relieve me of any of my work, nor did it help me either by its local knowledge or by keeping a more continuous watch on the various localities.

The village watch punchayets were appointed merely to relieve the Government of the odium and labour of assessing, collecting, and distributing the wages of the village watch. Any assumption of authority on their part was regarded with jealousy as likely to interfere with the authority of the Police. The Government, which was attempting in the face of so much difficulty to check the undue influence of the landlords, was not disposed

to set up another influence, which might be only the landlords again in disguise.

Already there was in preparation a new law of landlord and tenant for giving reality to that independence of the landlord which the Act of 1859 had been intended to secure for the tenant, and had not secured. There was too much likelihood that the landlord, even without the help of his nominees in the punchayets, would be able to drive a coach and four through any Act that could be framed for keeping him off his tenant's back.

Yet the need of order in the villages was becoming greater. It had always been great.

The land available for house sites was scarce; houses, especially in the greater villages like Begumpore, were squeezed together. Apart from questions of sanitation, there was urgent need for the regulation of such things as rights of way and other easements, both in the village, with its crowded homesteads and fenced fields, and in the rice lands, where there were seldom any made roads, and a man's fields were scattered about, mixed with those of his neighbours.

Questions of boundaries; of mischief by men, children, and cattle, and many other questions that arise in a crowded community, had constantly to be adjusted. And then there were the wants now only beginning to be recognised—roads, water-supply, drainage, sanitation, schools—wants as pressing in the villages as in the towns, and need-

ing for their satisfaction in the villages the same attention to minute detail as in the towns.

While the authority of the landlords lived, the affairs of localities were supposed to be the concern of the landlords and not of the Government.

As an exception to this rule, the Government had made certain urban areas independent of the landlords, and provided them with municipal committees empowered to raise and expend funds within the municipal area for public purposes. But the exempted areas contained only a small proportion of the population. Even in this sub-metropolitan area the municipalities only had one-fifth of the whole. The rest remained under the control of the landlords, always inefficient, and now being paralysed by our own legislation.

The Government took a very keen interest in the improvement of the towns. It exempted them, when the Cess Act was passed, from the charges which the villages had to bear for famine roads. To set free more funds for sanitation, it relieved them of another charge which the villages continued to bear—that of the town Police.

It urged the towns continually to spend more on their roads, drains, water, lighting, schools, and other works of public utility.

No such reforms were urged on the villages. Their wants were, on the contrary, ignored. And would have gone on being ignored but for certain events which compelled attention to them. The first of these events was the Orissa famine



of 1866, whose horrors touched the conscience of the Government of Bengal, of the Government of India, and even of the British nation beyond the sea.

From the year of the famine—1866—onwards the *laissez faire* policy of the past was finally dropped. No longer permitting itself to say : “Am I my brother’s keeper?” the Government made itself responsible that there should be no repetition of the horrors of Orissa. The Orissa famine of 1866 was followed by the Behar famine of 1874 and the Madras famine of 1878; and from the experience of these (and later) famines a policy of warfare with famine was developed, the following points of which may here be mentioned.

We may expect that every now and then famine will appear somewhere in India. There is no knowing in what region it will appear; therefore we must be ready for it at all points, especially in the more remote villages.

For a famine campaign, as for a campaign of arms, we need to be prepared beforehand. It is too late to begin our preparations when the time for action has come. Everything must always be ready for mobilisation at short notice. A successful famine campaign cannot be conducted without the co-operation of the people themselves. Therefore the people must be organised; and, as famine comes like a thief in the night, ought to be permanently organised.

The next event was the Census of 1872—our

first Census, which compelled attention to the villages in two ways.

In the first place, it revealed to the Government and to the world how fearfully great a weight of responsibility the Government of Bengal had to bear—of how many millions of “brothers” it was the “keeper.”

In the second place, the experience of this Census, and of the Census of 1881 which followed it, taught that for carrying such a task through successfully the whole country—towns and villages alike—must be organised. In this one subdivision of Serampore we had to get together and train a force of a thousand volunteer enumerators—one for every sixty houses, with their circle officers and charge superintendents complete. And this had to be done separately for each area, since, as the whole work was carried out in the same night all over India, there was no possibility of using any of the enumerators for two areas in succession.

Thus once in ten years for all future time the whole population, villages as well as towns, would have to be organised. This was another strong reason why the organisation should be made permanent. It *might* be needed at any time to cope with famine; it certainly would be needed once every ten years for the Census.

I shall only mention one more event—one which affected Serampore very seriously—and that is the great fever epidemic known as the “Burdwan fever,” which in the seventies swept over a great

part of Bengal, including our own District of Hooghly.

This calamity, though not so sudden as the Orissa famine, and therefore causing less sensation, was far more destructive of life and health.

An investigation into its causes proved among other things that sanitation had been utterly neglected; and that in particular many embankments for agricultural purposes and also for roads and railways had been constructed without due provision of waterways, thus interfering with the drainage.

As in the case of the Orissa famine, so in that of the Burdwan fever, the conscience of the Government was touched; and it was resolved that the neglect which had contributed to the virulence of the fever epidemic should cease.

Sanitary work is a work of local detail, and calls loudly for local organisation. Nowhere was that called for more loudly than throughout the great and densely peopled villages in the interior of Serampore.

Although the need for sanitary work was not so great in the less densely peopled areas—what may by comparison be called the country—there was almost no part of my little world where it was not needed; and in most parts it was needed urgently.

Other circumstances calling for organisation will readily suggest themselves to the reader.

During the whole of my time at Serampore

there was under discussion a Local Self-Government Bill, which was to provide an organisation for the villages as well as for the towns.

We were at the parting of the ways. It was a good time for putting forward suggestions. The Government of Bengal, not a little perplexed as to how it should set to work with its reforms, had its mind open and was ready to welcome ideas.

## XV

### ORDER

WE must now get back from general reflections to the practical matters at that time occupying my mind—a succession of concrete cases which had to be dealt with on their merits as they arose.

We had chaos : we needed order.

Fortunately, I think, almost the first concrete case I had to deal with was that of the Begumpore Union, described in Chapter X. Here was chaos; and order was brought about by putting the right people in charge of the business of the Union.

In my time this punchayet was a model of efficiency. Not only did it manage, to the satisfaction of all concerned, the business for which it was appointed, of assessing, collecting, and paying the wage fund of the village watch, but I was able to depend on it for help in other branches of work.

In everything touching the villages of the Union the punchayet was consulted. If two of the villagers had a case in Court which I thought

ought to be settled at home, the matter was put in the hands of the punchayet, which very often succeeded in bringing the parties to an agreement. If there was doubt about an income-tax assessment, the punchayet was asked for its opinion, which was generally of use. Its aid was enlisted for keeping in order its twenty-six village watchmen. When I tried my plan for recording vital statistics, this punchayet undertook, and carried out satisfactorily, the work in all the twenty-six beats of its Union. When a road was to be made or mended within the Union the punchayet used to raise subscriptions to meet our grant. It was entrusted with the expenditure of the money, and managed the work prudently, without scandal or friction, and without expense to the public.

Regarding improvements of drains or tanks, or other sanitary works, I relied on the opinion of the punchayet, and found it more satisfactory and trustworthy than the reports of the Police, which were, in such matters, usually our only source of information.

Its local knowledge was perfect, and as it was also honest, I found its help invaluable. I got valuable help from this punchayet in the time of the Census. In short, if I could have got local bodies like this punchayet in charge of villages everywhere, we should have taken a very long step indeed away from chaos towards order.

Why, then, should we not boldly take the forward step?

Apart from the consideration that men like Nabagopal Ghose and his colleagues were not to be found in every village, there were two very formidable lions in the path—the landlord, and *doladoli*.

The landlord was in those times in bad odour—more so, I think, than the facts justified. Considering, however, that the Government had now for twenty years been endeavouring, so far in vain, to untwist the fingers of the landlord from the tenant's throat, it was not unnatural to suspect that he might use any local body we appointed as an instrument of oppression.

I believe I fully realised the risk; but there were reasons why it should be accepted rather than that nothing should be done. In the first place, we already had punchayets all over the subdivision with ample powers, as the early history of the Begumpore Union plainly showed, to annoy the villagers even if they confined themselves within the four corners of the existing law.

In the second place, the landlords had already in their hands so strong an instrument of torture in the Law Court, that nothing else could add to their existing power. If the effort then in progress to curb their power of oppression through the Law Court came to anything, surely their power could be curbed in other ways also.

In the third place, when one went into the villages and talked as man to man with the peasants on the one side and the landlords or their agents on the other, one began to see that between landlords and tenants there was a good deal of give and take—of live and let live—which enabled them without much talk—perhaps even without much thought—of tyranny on the one side or martyrdom on the other to rub along together.

We officials were perhaps too prone to judge from what came to notice in Court trials. We were apt to take a temporary state of disturbance for a normal condition of things; and to take too seriously the extreme allegations and claims made on the one side and on the other.

Comparing the demeanour of parties in Court with their demeanour out of Court, I could not avoid the conclusion that much of the vehemence of both sides was part of a process of bargaining which would end in a deal. It was also to be considered that many of our landlords—especially those of the new school, who were the most extreme in pushing their claims—were enlightened enough to know that stripping the tenants bare, or driving them by oppression into hostility, must bring to themselves loss and not profit. So far as I could see, indeed, their great object in keeping a tight hold on the tenants was neither avarice (since they were getting as much as was possible) nor greed of power, but a dislike of having thrust



between them and the tenants the foreign influence of the usurer.

Indeed, one great and serious danger in the various measures now being taken to force apart landlord and tenant was that the tenant, accustomed to be attached to somebody, might attach himself to the usurer instead of the landlord—a change not for the better.

To me it seemed impossible to keep the tenant unattached. We ought rather to give him a worthy object to which he might attach himself, and not persist in a vain effort to keep him hanging at a loose end.

The second lion in the path was “doladoli” (lit. the taking of sides) or faction feud.

It was a common official complaint that there was no public spirit in the land. The people were all, high and low, given up to “doladoli,” and any public body that could be set up in the villages would be captured by, and become a prey to this fell demon.

Indeed, there was too much ground for such an opinion. Who that wished well to Serampore and knew its wants but must feel bitter at the sight (taking one prominent instance) of two leaders of the Gossain family, her chief citizens, throwing away in a petty private quarrel between themselves forty thousand rupees? No doubt neither of them liked it, but pride made both persist.

And there were instances of the same thing,

though few on so large a scale, in thousands all through the District.

We had indeed reason to abhor the evil demon of "doladoli."

In a certain village belonging to Government, and therefore in my direct charge, it came to my notice that there was "doladoli." The only two Brahmins in the village had been at feud for many years.

"What a pity," said the villagers, "that this should be!"

Thinking it would be a meritorious act to reconcile these two enemies, I sent for them. I well remember how they looked as they stood before me—two handsome old men, back to back, each with his nose in the air.

I asked one of them what he had against the other.

"Nothing now," he replied.

I asked the same question of the other, and he also answered: "Nothing now."

"Are you willing, then," I asked of the first, "to sit down and eat with our friend here?"

"I am willing," was the reply; "but *he* will never agree."

And the second gave the same answer.

"Well," said I, "since both are willing, I am going to make a feast, to which I invite you both."

They agreed to come, and my Hindoo rent collector was charged with the arrangements.

But the rent collector was not a Brahmin;

and the two principals sent me word that, since it was to be, they preferred to make arrangements of their own. It was all one to me so long as they ate together, and I consented. The feast was held ; friendship followed, and what was better, lasted.

I have quoted this little incident because it seems to throw light on "doladoli." The occasion which began it may be unimportant—even forgotten. What keeps it alive is pride—ambition—a desire to be first ; and what gives it vigour is energy.

Now both pride and energy are in themselves no bad things. Disciplined and directed to proper ends, they were the very qualities we needed so sorely and deplored the lack of among the people—ingredients, in fact, of "*public spirit*." They were with us in embarrassing abundance, but run wild—doing harm instead of good.

To destroy them was impossible, even had we desired it. But might they not be caught, tamed, harnessed, and made to serve the public instead of this perpetual pulling against one another ?

The idea of a "faction of order" began to haunt me.

It is to be borne in mind that the object I had in view was not to prove a theory, or to get the law changed, but to improve the condition of our villages. It was hopeless to make proposals to Government, to lay my opinion before it and ask its sanction for a trial of my plans. That

would mean hanging the plans up (to take the most favourable view) until it should be too late for me to carry them out; or, what was more likely, seeing the schemes passed bodily into the oblivion of a pigeon-hole.

So I determined to start a few modest experiments of my own, trusting by care to avoid serious trouble over them.

This was in the time when Lord Lytton was Viceroy. Lord Ripon had not appeared on the scene; and there was as yet no word of those measures of Local Self-Government — “Lokil Sluff,” as it was called in the province — which were in the womb of the near future.

When I informed my superior — Mr. John Beames—of what I was doing, his verdict was:

“You are taking a big risk, but I am glad you are taking it.”

And that was the nearest thing to approval I could expect from any of the higher authorities.

I think the number of my experimental bodies was three, including that in Begumpore, which served as model.

One of them was in a group of villages to which the Village Watch Act had not been extended, and where there was accordingly no official punchayet.

I called my new bodies “Boards of Guardians,” and made use of them in the same way as I had begun to use the Begumpore “punchayet.”

It may suffice to say here that the experiment

succeeded. My Boards of Guardians worked well, and distinctly improved the condition of the villages under their charge. I forget the exact course of the events that followed. Lord Ripon succeeded Lord Lytton, and one result of his advent was a very broad measure for Local Self-Government in Bengal—or rather two measures, one for the towns, and the other for the non-municipal area.

In connection with the latter, I found, much to my surprise, that my modest experiments, the reports on whose working would in ordinary circumstances have gone to rest in some dusty pigeon-hole, were thought worthy of being mentioned not only to the Viceroy of India, but also to the Secretary of State, as a proof that it was possible to do the work they had been doing.

I was glad I had not let my little plants get within reach of the atmosphere of the secretariat, which must surely have destroyed them.

By virtue of having actually done something, I had become, for the moment, an authority, and took courage to work out a scheme for considerably extending the Board of Guardians system which I had begun. I had not by any means a clean slate to work on.

There were, in the first place, the towns, with their exemption from charges for famine roads, and their exemptions from the charge for the village Police—exemptions which must excite the jealousy of the villages, since these could not hope for the same relief.

Then there were the relations between the District Police and the village watch. Again, there were the dangers of the landlord and of "doladoli." And there was the new Government measure, which must not be interfered with.

Obviously the fewer arrangements my scheme disturbed the more likely was it to be favourably regarded.

Accordingly I laid on one side the questions of existing towns and of Police.

As regarded the Government measure, which was designed to reproduce in an altered form the District and subdivisional Boards, I pressed the view that my scheme would give a body to the system of which they were but outlines, not being local, in the proper sense of the word, at all.

I contemplated a network of my small Boards, groups of which might be combined in Unions, and the Unions might themselves form larger combinations. Such a scheme would at least, if the Boards were electoral, provide genuine constituencies for the election of members.

In my dreams I saw for every neighbourhood its local authority assessing, collecting, and administering the various local rate funds; managing the village watch, protecting local rights of way, public pastures, and other public interests; caring for village drains, roads, water-supply, conservancy, and schools; sitting on Benches for the trial locally of petty disputes, acting also as arbitrators, holding all local inquiries, helping

the District authority in all work that touched their villages.

In a word, I wanted to give to the people through their representatives that most precious gift—the *key of their own door*.

I forget the details of my scheme. It provided safeguards for all the abuses I could think of. I shall mention only two.

I proposed that the ancient village office of Mondle, or head-man, should be restored. The “Mondle” had been converted into a servant of the landlord. He was to be taken from the landlord and given back to the village.

The other safeguard, which indeed covered the whole case, was to give full discretionary power to the Government officer in charge over the Boards themselves and all their acts.

Experience convinced me that, during the experimental stage at least, this was a condition absolutely essential for success.

My proposals went in, and met with the fate of so many schemes submitted to the tender mercies of the clerks up aloft. I never saw them again, nor was asked to explain them, nor was allowed to answer objections or criticisms.

They were duly pecked to pieces, and one or two of the bits found their way into the Bill. My little plants, having been breathed upon by the clerks and withered, went into the museum where such things are kept as interesting dried specimens.

During the brief time when I was looked on as an authority, I was honoured with an invitation to a conference of four, presided over by the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Rivers Thompson. I soon saw that my ideal was not the same as that of the Government. I was trying for a living organism: the Government for a machine. At least so it seemed to me. It did not seem very clear where the motive power was to come from.

The form in which my "*Boards of Guardians*" came out of the secretariat laboratory was something that was called in the Bill a "*Union*." I have never acknowledged the "*Union*" for my own. The few bodies of this kind that were created came, so far as I know, to nothing. The life was out of them.

So long as I was in the subdivision I continued to strive for a reform of our road policy, but without success. The Road Board continued to flounder on with its short supply of costly yet badly kept metalled roads, without feeders and without village roads, having for its one consolation the pleasure of fancying that its policy was in the latest English fashion!

Towards the end of my time at Serampore we had a deal of talking over the various laws on the anvil—the Tenancy Bill, the two Local Self-Government Bills, and the Ilbert Bill, a measure, insignificant to begin with, which ended in nearly tearing the country to pieces.



I spent my last three months on a special inquiry for the Tenancy Bill, which to me was most interesting and instructive.

And then I had to take up my belongings and leave my little "world"—no longer mine—to the care of another, moving on—as the Indian official always has to do, sooner or later.

BOOK III

ALIPORE, MIDNAPORE, HOWRAH  
AND ARRAH



## I

### ALIPORE AND MIDNAPORE

I NOW entered on that stage which comes in the career of every Indian civilian, the intermediate stage, when he moves on from appointment to appointment, never remaining long in one place.

I had less of this vagabond life than fell to the lot of most of my friends.

It began with a month as Joint Magistrate (Chief Assistant to the District Officer) at Alipore. This was the headquarters (really part of Calcutta) of the original territory of the East India Company in Bengal—the twenty-four Pergunnahs—occupying the east bank of the Hooghly and its “hinterland,” as Hooghly District occupied the west.

The District did not include, though it enclosed, the city of Calcutta, which was, as we would call it nowadays in England, a city county—a District by itself. Nevertheless the suburbs, with the river-side and other towns, gave us a large urban population. In the “hinterland,” which lay to the east, there was much marsh and forest; for the District lay wholly in the delta of the Ganges, of which

the Hooghly was the western limit, and included a large part of the "Sunderbans."

I spent so short a time here—all at Headquarters—that I had no experience worth telling. I saw the beginning of the "Ilbert Bill" agitation, which had come in the shape of an excited meeting of European citizens in the Calcutta Town Hall, the first genuine public meeting of Europeans, I believe, ever held in Calcutta, at least in modern times.

I looked on at this.

But the subject is out of my beat, and may be left.

Leaving with the District Officer my personal opinion of that measure (for I was one of those whom it touched personally), I went on furlough, and spent a happy twenty months in my native land, whence I returned, thoroughly rested and full of energy, at the end of the year 1884.

The first sight I saw on arrival in Calcutta was the landing of the new Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, who had come to succeed Lord Ripon.

In connection with this a friend of mine overheard in the streets of Calcutta the following characteristic dialogue :

"Has your worship seen the 'Làt Sahib'?" (Viceroy).

"Which 'Làt Sahib'?—him who comes or him who goes?"

"Oh, who cares to see the going man? The coming man it is we want to see."

The Ilbert Bill and the two Local Self-Government Bills, which had now become law, were, according to all the native papers, destined to make Lord Ripon famous for all time as the most enlightened Viceroy India ever had. This was the last chance Calcutta would have of looking on his face. Yet to the crowd he was already nothing: all were turning away from him to welcome the new man.

The moral is obvious.

About a hundred miles to the south-west of Calcutta is Midnapore, the capital of a District of the same name. You went there first by steamer down the Hooghly to Oolooberia, and then by canal westwards, crossing on the way the great tidal river the Roopnarayan. At the head of the canal, where it receives its waters from the Cossye river, is the town of Midnapore; and here, on my return from furlough, I was sent to be Joint Magistrate.

The District of Midnapore in shape and size resembles Yorkshire. Midnapore town corresponds to York, and there are three subdivisions—Ghattal, Tumlook, and Contai, whose headquarters correspond respectively to Whitby, Hull, and Sheffield.

The sea washes its southern coast; the Roopnarayan, its eastern. On the south and east—the seaward side,—the soil is flat, black, alluvial; and, except where water-logged, fertile. The popula-

tion of this part is nearly as dense as the rural population of Serampore; and, like that region also, it is a land of embankments.

The alluvial belt extends along the sea coast into Orissa. The landward part of the District—the north and west—belonged to Central India, with a red soil, forests, and on the western horizon hills. The ground is undulating, the population sparse.

There were almost no Mahomedans in the District. The alluvial belt was inhabited mainly by Hindoos; the landward country of forest and red soil by “Junglies”—the Kols, Sonthals, Uraons, and other aboriginal tribes who had cleared the forest for cultivation, with a mixture of the Hindoos who had followed up these pioneers and were already fast supplanting them.

Midnapore is one of the East India Company's oldest possessions in Bengal. In the days, just after the Permanent Settlement, before we took Orissa, it was a place of arms, both to guard the Orissa frontier, and as a station for the control of the wild forest and hill tribes to the west.

Midnapore, remote as it seemed from Calcutta, was even in my time the chief outlet for the still more remote “hinterland” of Singbhoom and the Far West.

While the west and north were a hundred years ago given up to savagery, the east and south were civilised. Ghattal was the chief seat of the weaving trade, the products of whose

myriad looms the Company's ships used to carry to Europe; Tumlook was the home of Nuncoomar, that famous Brahmin, hanged for forgery in the time of Warren Hastings; Hijli was a great salt station in the early days of the Company, and down beyond Contai was "Birkul," the Brighton to which the rank and fashion of the days of Warren Hastings used to flee from stuffy Calcutta.

Midnapore town was a great contrast to all the other towns—Comillah, Goalundo, and Serampore—that I had hitherto lived in. Its river was not, as at Comillah, above the town and held in by embankments; nor, like the Ganges at Goalundo, did it wash over the whole country in flood time; nor, like the Hooghly, was it tidal. It was a hill stream, like the Damoodar, and well below the level of the town.

The town stood on a plateau of solid red laterite, which rang like iron to a blow, with wells in it that were a hundred feet deep, and yet sometimes ran dry. We were off the soft, black, quaking bog of the Ganges delta. There were undulations, and even, in the distance, hills.

After the closely-packed houses of Serampore, and the fierce incessant struggles over scraps of land, there was about everything a fine spaciousness in which one felt able to breathe freely. The Bazaar was huddled together, but everywhere else space was ample. All the European houses had good compounds: that of the Judge was a park,



nearly two miles long, and from Gope point, its western extremity—a bluff overhanging the river—one could look away into the far distance, even to the Binpur Hills. Hard by also were forests where bears lived.

I spent here about eight months in all. My duties as Joint Magistrate kept me at Headquarters, so that I never went on tour.

Even at Headquarters, though I was in daily contact with large numbers, the intercourse was stiff and formal—strictly confined to business; and nearly always with new people unknown to me. The variety was interesting, but prevented acquaintance from ripening into friendship.

The District was reputed to be the heaviest for revenue work in Bengal. It had an enormous revenue roll; and this involved correspondingly heavy work in the assessment and collection of famine cesses.

Then there were large estates belonging to, or in charge of Government; the assessment and collection of the income-tax; a large and complicated system of embankments, managed by Government; and the two canals—that by which I had come, and another leading through Contai into Orissa, with their traffic and irrigation revenues to collect. Then there was the heavy Treasury at Headquarters, with its three subdivisional branches.

Add to this numerous appeals, reports, interviews, and much correspondence; the general

supervision of all departments; and the important business of interviewing the various Rajahs and potentates of the District. In my little world of Serampore there was room for many such personages; but here we had a world fifteen times larger, with six times the population.

It was my business to relieve my chief of those parts of his work which it was possible for him to pass on.

There were, of course, others to share with me the delegated duties. My special charge as Joint Magistrate was the criminal side. That is, I had to take petitions, distribute work, myself try the more important criminal cases (we had at Headquarters to deal with the cases of 3000 square miles); supervise the work of all the Magistrates in the District, and of the Government and village Police; to inspect jail, hospital, municipality, police station, distillery, excise shops, pound, college, schools, and any other institution there was, at Headquarters.

I had also at various times charge of departments, such as Roads, Excise, Treasury, and Record-room.

Perched on my eyrie at Midnapore, and having to watch so large a field, I abandoned for the time the pleasure of getting down among the people, contenting myself perforce with a bird's-eye view of things.

I have passed over in almost complete silence the work which at Serampore and here at Midna-

pore occupied most of my time—that of criminal justice; for this was work we all had to do everywhere. At Serampore I was drilled into accuracy by being within an hour's journey of the District Judge at Hooghly on the one side, and the Calcutta High Court on the other. In such circumstances every bit of the work had to be fit to stand rough handling.

Of the many things connected with my criminal work at Midnapore, a few may be noted.

One is our singular want of success in getting any one punished for the crime of “dacoity” or gang robbery. We had a judge prone to acquit. If I remember rightly, he acquitted in every case sent up except one, and in the one case where he convicted the accused were let off on appeal by the High Court. It may have been the fault of the Police and of the committing Magistrates, but when we saw the reasons given for acquittal it did seem as if no mortal evidence would have satisfied the higher Courts; and the safest thing a man could possibly do, unless, indeed, he encountered a stout village watchman with a sword, like ours in Serampore, was to commit dacoity. Did a prisoner confess?—The confession had been extorted. Did he give up stolen property?—It was a “plant” of the Police. Did a witness identify a prisoner?—The Court would not believe that in the fright and confusion of a dacoity any one could identify any one else. No matter what evidence was offered, it was unsatisfactory. The

more plausible it was, the less was it believed, being more likely to have been concocted.

Whether they were right or wrong, these uniform acquittals had two bad effects.

Dacoities went on, for impunity emboldened the criminals. And they ceased to be reported; for what did a reported case mean?

To the victim, trouble and no satisfaction; to the Police officer, a bad mark for a crime undetected, or for a case sent up and acquitted; to the committing Magistrate, the disgrace of having believed evidence he ought not to have believed.

The victims and the Police, then, were alike interested in suppressing the facts, so that we might have—and I think we sometimes had—tranquillity on paper, and a reign of terror in the villages.

This is one natural consequence of a denial of justice. Crime had been committed and no one punished. What mattered it to the people who was at fault—the Police, or the trying Magistrate, or the Courts? All were parts of the same administration.

I met with a different consequence of the denial of justice which impressed me very deeply. Certain honest and quiet looking peasants were brought before me charged with the murder of a “Moochi” (skinner). When called on to reply to the charge, they answered:

“Yes, we killed him. He had been poisoning our cattle, and we twice made him over to the

Police. He was let go both times. We begged him to leave off his bad practices, but he went on with them. What were we to do? We had to kill him."

Men to whom justice is denied are apt to take with their own hands that "wild justice," revenge.

One day we received a shock in the office. There came a bill from the Government Pleader at a subdivision who claimed fees amounting to a good many thousand rupees for his services in conducting a prosecution before the Subdivisional Officer. Wondering what could have happened, I sent for the Record. It was a case against a land-owner for damaging an embankment.

I found that there had been upwards of sixty adjournments. There was an eminent lawyer on either side; the Magistrate was a worthy but weak man, and time was wasted—squandered—on both sides unchecked by the Court. Sometimes a whole hearing would be spent in arguing whether a question should or should not be put; and in short they managed to spin the case out for sixty hearings. If it had not been the interest of the lawyers, both sides having long purses, to make the case last, I suspect they would have finished it in more like six than sixty hearings.

We got to know of this simply from the fact of a bill being presented. The opposite side suffered in silence, and no one made any complaint.

I have mentioned these instances, not to show

that our justice is always a failure, but to show that it is not always a success.

What a situation these results of the dacoity cases disclose, whichever view of the facts we take ! Let us suppose that in every case the accused were not guilty. Then we have it that many serious crimes were committed ; that a department of our justice—the Police—let slip all the real criminals, and swept into their net a number of innocent people whom another department of our justice—the Magistrate—was fooled into committing for trial, and in one case a judge was even persuaded to convict. And the triumph of our justice amounted to this, that one of its departments rescued from the claws of another of its departments these its innocent victims. Seeing, however, that in only a few of the actual cases any arrests were made at all, and that only some of those arrested were committed for trial, the action of the tribunals in letting go the whole of those committed for trial can only, taking a common-sense view of the matter, be attributed to a legal maxim run mad.

One calls to mind a cynical remark in a little book I once read—*Scintillae Juris* :

“It is a curious fact that the only person the law presumes to be innocent is he who is accused of the crime.”

Whether the fault lay, as the Courts said, with the Police and the Magistrates, or, as the Police said, with the Courts ; or whether both were to blame, or neither, the heavy reproach rested on our

justice that it had wholly failed to protect our peaceful subjects from the dacoits.

It is a fashion in certain circles, while magnifying and praising the judicial, to denounce the executive branch of our justice, as if they were not members of the same body.

Those who indulge in this practice perhaps forget that on the executive branch falls the heavy end of the work—the discovery of the facts and the assembling of the evidence.

I venture to say that if the judge were to exchange duties with the policeman, the same critics would handle him as roughly as they now handle the policeman.

The roads in the laterite part of the District—the west and north—could be maintained, because of the nature of the soil, almost as well as, and much more cheaply than the metalled roads in Hooghly. Owing, however, to the poverty of the soil the rental, and consequently the yield of the road rate, was much lower.

In the black, swampy, alluvial south and east roads had to be embanked, and were very heavy unless metalled with brick or stone. There were no railways nearer than Calcutta; and the only waterways were the two canals and the Roopnaryan. The District had to depend on its roads.

The same difficulties were met with here that we had in Hooghly—traffic strangled for want of good roads, and large ratepaying areas deprived

of their funds. I drew on the map with a pair of compasses a circle enclosing three hundred square miles thickly populated, and all paying rates, in which there was not a yard of District road.

The chief feature of the Police here was the great number of "paiks." These were originally fighting men who held their land on condition of turning out to fight when required. Their existence was a mark that this region had formerly been on the frontier.

The chief articles of consumption paying excise duty were country spirits, beer, opium, and ganja (a sort of hemp).

Country spirits and beer were used nearly all on the red soil, where more meat was eaten. I found spirit-sellers buying up beer-shops to close them and drive the Sonthals, who were beer-drinkers, to the spirit-shops. I remember closing one big shop in the midst of the palanquin-bearers' quarters in Midnapore town, where it was demoralising that hard-working community.

Opium was consumed chiefly on the densely-peopled, alluvial soil of the south, where vegetables were the only diet, and malaria prevailed. A pinch of opium was part of the daily diet.

The use of ganja, again, was confined to the boating centres—the Roopnarayan. When taken as an intoxicant, ganja maddens; but it is a



wonderful support in long-continued and hard toil, such as the boatman has sometimes to endure.

In Midnapore I first met with the recruiting of coolies for the Assam tea-gardens. Assam was hundreds of miles away, and Government required the coolies to be examined, to make sure that they were physically fit, and also to see that they understood the terms of their engagements, and were going of their own free will.

I had charge of this business, and many strange-looking people passed through my hands; for they came out of the jungles and the hills to the westwards.

Naturally one's attention is attracted to cases where there is abuse. Two such cases I remember well. The first is that of a Brahmin boy, son of a widow, whose mother accused the recruiter of kidnapping him. The recruiter, I think, claimed that the lad himself wished to go. The mother aroused strong feeling in the town, and the recruiter's lodgings were mobbed by Hindoos, who scouted the idea that a Brahmin lad would knowingly agree to go as a coolie to an Assam tea-garden. Such a thing was not beyond the bounds of possibility, for there are Brahmins in most employments nowadays, but in this case no doubt they were right.

The other case was of a comely young woman who was brought in very gaily dressed, and presented by the recruiter as his wife. She

had been followed from her home in the west by her father, and there was a dramatic scene in Court, her alleged husband urging her to go on; her alleged father pleading with her to turn back with him. At first she seemed to be for going on, and even denied that it was her father who stood before her; so that proceedings had to be stopped for some days while an officer went to find out in her native village who was who. I think she ended by going home with her father—a lucky choice for her. The marriage would have lasted until she was beyond all chance of return. Then her fine clothes would have been taken from her, and she sold into bondage, while her “husband” returned for a new wife.

Interesting and important as Midnapore was, it made no impression on me; for I knew I was soon to leave. And so it was. In August (I think) of 1885 I was ordered to go and take charge of the District of Howrah.

## II

### HOWRAH AND ARRAH

THE District of Hooghly is a wedge enclosed between the Roopnarayan on the west and the Hooghly on the east, with its point at their junction. It is cut in two by the Damoodar, which joins the Hooghly above this point.

The broad north end of the wedge consists of the Headquarters and Serampore subdivisions on the east, and the Jehanabad subdivision (now Arambagh) on the west side of the Damoodar. The Howrah District occupies the whole south, or narrow end, of the wedge on both sides of the Damoodar.

Formerly Howrah, like Serampore, was a part of the Hooghly District, and for revenue purposes it still is. But since the rise of Howrah town, Howrah has been a separate District for all other purposes, with a District Officer of its own. It is about the same size as Warwickshire, and well provided with waterways, the Roopnarayan, Damoodar, and Hooghly north and south, and the Midnapore canal crossing them east and west. It was more densely peopled than Serampore.

Howrah and Bally, its river-side towns, had nearly double the population of the five Serampore towns.

Below Howrah there were no towns—only villages. Probably this was because of the danger of a storm wave. That of 1864 swept Calcutta, and cast big ships upon its streets; that of 1876, which swept the islands of the Megna, might easily have come up the Hooghly instead. The bore—the small wave which ushers in every flowing tide—is a gentle hint of what may come in some conditions of wind and water.

The interior was much like that of Serampore. Behind the town were marshes, drained under a scheme like that of Serampore. The old bed of the Saraswati meandered into the Hooghly round behind them. The villages, especially just behind Howrah, were, if anything, larger and more densely peopled than those in Serampore. No railways at that time ran to the south of Howrah on the west bank.

As in Midnapore, so in Howrah, being a bird of passage, I had little opportunity of learning the District, though I did some touring. I was taken up chiefly with the town. Howrah town was by far the most important thing in the District, and my chief work was that which my office as Chairman of the municipality gave me.

Howrah town was to Calcutta what Southwark is to London. There was between them only one bridge, a floating bridge opened from time to time

for the passage of ships. The great ocean liners were all on the Calcutta side. Calcutta was the port, with its wharves and warehouses; Howrah was the industrial town, with its railway terminus and works, its jute, cotton, rope and other factories, its foundries and shipyards. Its population was made up of the workers they employed, and those who catered for the workers.

Communication with the east bank was chiefly by boats, which swarmed everywhere.

Our municipality was a much bigger concern than even the Serampore one. We had a paid secretary, a conservancy tramway, and an imposing office. But in some ways we were far behind-hand—especially in the matter of drainage and of water-supply. It will be remembered that one object kept in view when the Eden canal was made was a water-supply for Howrah. In the end that was got from the Hooghly at Serampore. In those days, however, the people had to choose between dirty tanks and brackish river water; while some, of whom I was one, had a supply brought daily from the Calcutta hydrants.

Towards a drainage scheme we had got so far as making a plan, and we had a scheme, but were only at the stage of discussion.

A peculiar institution in Indian towns is the sweeper brigade. The sweeper differs from our scavenger both in his nature and in his work. The sweeper is not only a trade: it is a caste trade. You cannot get an Indian who is not a

sweeper by caste to handle rubbish, any more than you can get any but a dome to handle dead bodies. We had in Howrah, as in most Indian towns, no drain-pipes or sewers for removing the matter that must be got rid of in every town. That was taken away by men and women with buckets and carts, and buried in ground set aside for the purpose.

Our staff of sweepers numbered about a thousand. They were organised under a head-sweeper, who had only to lift his finger and they would all strike work. Every pay-day he attended at the office, and took his fee from each man. Though he did no work for us—he was far too great a man!—the municipality, to keep him in good humour, made him an allowance of fifty rupees a month. His monthly income was a thousand rupees (£100), more or less, and he drove about in his coach. When in connection with our Serampore “Boards of Guardians” we were trying to organise a conservancy service, one great difficulty was the scarcity of sweepers. Here in Howrah I could see one secret of the scarcity. It is a point deserving the consideration of advocates for wholesale sanitary reform in India that any scheme must be limited by the supply of this humble but necessary class, unless some way is found of overcoming the prejudices of other classes against doing sweeper’s work.

The new Municipal Act had recently come into force, and Howrah had held its first election. Of

its commissioners part were elected, and the rest were appointed by the Government.

There was an old Scottish soldier who had taken his discharge after the Mutiny, had married an Indian wife, and had been settled for many years as manager of a ropery in Howrah. He was the largest employer of labour in his ward, and had every reason to believe himself popular. Being a gifted writer and a strong radical, he had for years back been demanding with indignant eloquence in the Calcutta Press the enfranchisement of the down-trodden ratepayers of Howrah and other towns. When the franchise was granted to Howrah he offered himself as a candidate for his ward. Greatly to his chagrin he hardly polled a single vote; and this is the explanation that I heard. On the eve of the election a rumour was put about among the Mahomedans of the ward that he had threatened to bury a pig in their graveyard. This fine old soldier was convinced by his experience that the country was not ripe for the elective system. He accepted a Government nomination to the Committee, of which he was one of the most useful members. Indeed it was not easy to devise a suitable elective system for a town like Howrah. One of the last things I did before leaving was to analyse the voters' list. I found that most of the inhabitants had no votes; for the mill-workers lived in lodgings and were not qualified. The bulk of the rateable property had no effec-

tual voting power; for the Railway Company, mills, and other works had only a few votes between them, all told. The whole voting power lay in the hands of small shopkeepers and clerks, who had neither the numbers nor the intelligence, and only paid a small fraction of the rates.

I left behind me this pretty problem when I went away, and sometimes have wondered what was done about it.

My experience up to this time had lain so much in the line of municipal work that I fully expected to become some day Chairman of the Calcutta municipality. So little do we see what is before us!

I mentioned the collapse of a European candidate at the election. I think the "Ilbert Bill" controversy must have had something to do with it. Many years before, certain natives of India had entered the Indian Civil Service; and in the year 1883 the seniors among them were near the time when they might expect, if not passed over for promotion, to become District Officers. One of them represented to the Government of Bengal that his authority as District Officer would be weakened if he had not the same power that other District Officers had of dealing with Europeans brought before him.

The law provided that a European British subject charged with a criminal offence could claim to be tried by a Justice of the Peace, one of whose qualifications was that he must himself be



a European British subject. Those whom we know in England as "Justices" are in India called "Honorary Magistrates." The term "Justice of the Peace" has there the above special meaning.

The Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Ashley Eden, sent the letter to the Government of India, with the remark that if an Indian was fit to be a District Officer he was fit to try Europeans. The Government of Lord Ripon, taking a favourable view of it, decided to pass a law enabling Indians who were District Officers to try European British subjects.

Such persons, as a matter of convenience, had been known to waive their right of objection: this law was to take that right away. It was not needed to remedy any existing defect in the administration of justice, but simply to ensure an Indian District Officer from possible loss of prestige.

The measure was expected to slip through unnoticed as a small one of no general importance, and might have done so had not some logical mind in the Government detected the real principle, and followed it out. The principle was the removal of a slur on certain Indian Magistrates. The slur was that because they were Indians, "European British subjects" could not be compelled to accept them as judges. There must be many other Indians who did not deserve the slur any more than these prospective District Officers did; and accordingly the Govern-

ment resolved to take power to remove the slur from other Magistrates also; so Sir Courtney Ilbert, the Legal Member of Council, set to work and drafted the famous "Bill" which goes by his name.

Seeing the view taken, that it was a slur on an Indian Magistrate not to have compulsory jurisdiction over Europeans, there was every likelihood that, passing beyond Sir Ashley Eden's dictum, the Government would act on the principle that "an Indian who was fit to be a Magistrate was fit to try Europeans." A European safeguard was to be sacrificed to avoid wounding the pride of Indian Magistrates.

"What's all the row," asked a Behar planter of his agent, a Calcutta merchant, "about this Ilbert Bill? If I had done anything, I'd sooner be tried by a native than by a European. He would be more easily squared."

"Yes," answered my friend, "but suppose you had not done what you were accused of?"

"Ah, then," replied the planter, "I'd rather have the European."

That is the safeguard that was in danger—a safeguard not for crime, but for innocence.

The controversy that arose did much harm. Some native orators and writers said and wrote offensive things about Europeans, accusing all who opposed the Bill of a wish to screen criminals, and attacking the reputation not only of our men, but also of our women. Many Euro-

peans also said wild words that would have been better left unsaid.

It has been hinted that Sir Ashley Eden, who was not very friendly with the Behar planters, purposely left behind him this bomb to explode when he was gone. I prefer to believe that he had in his mind only a very small change in the law practically affecting nobody. But a bomb it was, as the explosion plainly showed.

With much trouble and after long delay a compromise was at last patched up, which, if it did not make for more efficient justice, at least brought Europeans and Indian District Officers to the same level, not by removing the "slur" from the Indian, but by putting it on the European.

I need not say that we Europeans had no wish to screen criminals.

In Calcutta the measure would have done little harm. But what of the lonely European, a homely Scot, or Devon or Norfolk man, perhaps, who could not make himself understood even to the college-bred Baboo? What if a woman had to give evidence, or, worse still, to stand her trial? I believe that in Bombay they took a less serious view of the measure, but we in Bengal almost unanimously objected to it, knowing the possibilities.

The lonely European in the outlying Districts ran risks enough as it was. It would have been trying him too high to force this new risk on him,

and tragedies would have ensued. Midnapore peasants are not the only human beings who are tempted to break the law of the land when its justice fails them.

I could never see why a man who is not given compulsory jurisdiction over other men should complain of a "slur."

Right-minded men are generally agreed that the duty of trying an accused person is disagreeable. It is not given as a compliment to the judge, but because the thing has to be done, and some one must do it. The very idea that there were Indians who claimed as their rightful privilege this disagreeable job was in itself enough to irritate the European community, especially the less intelligent among them, and arouse their resentment.

In Howrah the feeling over the Bill was very bitter. The large European community of railway drivers, guards, and mechanics had been, I was told, on the verge of a "white mutiny," for some supporters of the Bill, not content with words, had gone on to deeds.

I was on furlough during the heat of the controversy, and so was lucky enough to be out of it all. The wounds inflicted in the battle were nearly healed, though some of the scars will, I think, never wholly disappear. So I think the "Ilbert Bill" may not have been without its effect on the election campaign of our old soldier.

I found the management of District roads to

to be as unsatisfactory here as it had been in Serampore, and for the same reason—metalled roads. I was prepared for this from my experience in the Hooghly Committee, which, in my time, controlled the Howrah roads as well as those of Hooghly. Howrah had since then had its way, and got the separation it had been so anxious for, but the change only exposed the abuses more clearly. Though the same rate was collected from all the 600 square miles of the District except the towns, the whole fund practically was spent to keep up two metalled roads which served only the extreme north-east corner of the District, running from Howrah up to the Serampore border. These roads were, of course, useful, enabling large numbers of men living in their village homes and employed in the great towns to pass in carriages to and from business daily.

The only justification that I remember to have seen of what I must call fraud on the bulk of the ratepayers, was the difficulty of using the funds to advantage in a region with so many waterways. That might have justified the abolition of its rate, but hardly the appropriation of its fund for other areas.

As usual, I called attention to the injustice, with the expected result. What it was not convenient to see was winked at and went on.

At this time the Government had before it the question whether the village watchman's remuneration should be in money or in land. I advised

that in large villages, where the watchman's whole time is needed and paid for, it should be in money; in the smaller and purely agricultural villages, when little of his time is needed, in land. I had to argue this question over again many years after.

We had heavy floods when I was in Howrah, and a relief fund was raised. In attempting to distribute this fund I came to realise the difficulty of drawing a line, and how much less distress is caused by flood than by drought. We could not compensate the tenants for the loss of their crops; and we found that the poor, who might be supposed to be the chief sufferers, got full employment in making good the damage done to the houses of their wealthier neighbours. Damage to crops even proved in the end to be by no means so extensive as it seemed at first sight.

I had originally gone to Howrah for three months. I stayed on as District Officer for three months more, till the permanent officer joined. Then, after a short time with him as Joint Magistrate, I was moved on to be Joint Magistrate at Arrah, which place I reached in March 1886.

Arrah is on the East India Railway, close to the river Ganges, 400 miles from Howrah. As I was only in Arrah a few months, my gleanings there are but scanty. Here was the small house whose defence was one of the most heroic feats of the great Mutiny. Part of the estates of Koer Singh, the chief who led the attack, had been confiscated

and had come into the hands of Messrs. Thomson and Milne, a firm who proved that the Indian peasant is not slow to accept a change he believes in. They invented and introduced an iron sugar mill, which quickly superseded everywhere the creaky old wooden machine previously in use.

I had at Arrah to try the queerest criminal case that ever came before me—the theft of an elephant. It caused a great sensation; for it arose out of the conversion of one of a great Hindoo family in Patna to Mahomedanism, and a consequent dispute over the family estates. The possession of the elephant being in this dispute a matter of importance, one side were accused of stealing it from the other. There was on either side a string of lawyers, both local and from Patna, and a list of, I think, 150 witnesses for the defence. The case ended in a conviction, which was upheld in appeal.

And so, farewell to Arrah! for in the end of June I got a summons to go in hot haste to relieve the Deputy Commissioner of the Sonthal Pergunnahs, who had broken down.

**BOOK IV**  
**THE SONTAL PERGUNNAHS**





## I

### THE SONTHAL PERGUNNAHS

My new District was strange to me. I doubt if I had heard its name before I was appointed to it.

I thought when I went to the S.P., as we called it for short, that I was to be there a week or two, keeping things going until the permanent man came from Tipperah to turn me out. I remained for nearly fourteen years. The main work of my life lay waiting for me there.

My time in Tipperah and in Serampore was a preparation for it, a better preparation than I would have planned had I known. Yet at the time it seemed odd—ten years of rigorous work in Regulation Districts; and now this!

The District of Sonthal Pergunnahs is neither in Bengal nor in Behar; it is a knot in the wood, between the two. It has an area of 5400 square miles, almost the same as Midnapore, and there are six subdivisions. Supposing Doomka, the capital, to be London, the subdivisional headquarters are—Godda at Bedford, Deoghur and Jamtara at Aylesbury and Basingstoke, Rajmahal and Pakour at Bury St. Edmunds and Colchester.

Its greatest length, north and south, is from Guildford to Ely ; east and west, from Ipswich to Oxford. It is traversed by two lines of railway eighty miles apart—the chord on the west passing through Jamtara and Deoghur, and the loop on the east passing through Pakour and Rajmahal. Yet though it is served by about 150 miles of railway, the nearest railway station to Doomka, the capital, is about forty miles distant.

The story of the Sonthal Pergunnahs is very wonderful. It is one of the youngest of the Bengal Districts, having been created and named in the year 1855, and yet every part of it is historically very old. It was formed by taking land from three other Districts—Beerbhoom in the south, Bhaugulpore in the north, and Moorshedabad in the east.

The 1500 square miles taken from Beerbhoom, which went to form the subdivisions of Deoghur and Jamtara, and part of Doomka, belonged at the time of the Permanent Settlement to the Rajah of Nagore. Being on the frontier, it had for hundreds of years been settled with feudal chiefs, called Ghatwals, or guardians of the passes. These were nearly all Bhunyas by race—aborigines who had become Hindoos—and their tenants were also their kinsmen, bound to turn out for military or Police service when required.

The whole western frontier of Bengal from this down to the Orissa border was settled with Ghatwals. Some of them could trace their ancestry back for hundreds of years.

At Deoghur, within this territory, stood the great Hindoo shrine of Baidyanath, crowded with priests, with beggars, and with pilgrims from every part of India.

The 3500 square miles taken from Bhaugulpore, from which the subdivisions of Doomka, Godda, Rajmahal, and part of Pakour were formed, consisted of the Rajmahal Hills, a range stretching from the Ganges, which washed their northern base, south to the Beerbhoom border, and of the flat land to the west and east of them.

The Hills were the strongholds, from time immemorial, of a race of Highlanders who had maintained their independence against the Mogul rulers of the land, hunting and raiding the plains for a livelihood. They were shepherded on the west by the barons of the plains, the Khetowrie Rajahs, with their tenant kinsfolk — aborigines become Hindoos, like the Bhunyas—whose duty it was to check their forays.

On the east side, between the Ganges and the Hills, stretched the great Mogul high road joining Delhi and Moorshedabad, which passed through Teliagurhi, the fortress-door between Behar and Bengal; Rajmahal, once the capital of the province, and Oodwa Nulla, where Major Adams gained a notable victory over the army of Suraja Dowla's successor some years after Plassey.

British officers had been taming the Highlanders, on whose account the 1300 square miles of the Hill tract was reserved from the Permanent Settlement;

exempted from the ordinary law, and provided with institutions of its own—a superintendent acting under the District Officer of Bhaugulpore; a council of chiefs to do justice; a regiment of Hill Rangers—archers—to act as police; stipends to ensure for the chiefs an honest livelihood; and great plans for bringing the Highlanders down from their hill tops, away from their hunting and their forays, to live a decent, quiet, industrious life, cultivating the straths and glens below.

The 400 square miles taken from Moorshedabad, which went into Pakour, belonged to the two Rajahs of Ambar and Sultanabad, both of old and distinguished Hindoo origin.

The Rajah of Ambar's claim to distinction was placed beyond doubt by the fact that in the palace of the Nawab at Moorshedabad, where it had been of old the custom to cast into prison defaulting landholders, and keep them there until their arrears of revenue were paid up, a private room was reserved for the Rajah of Ambar, so that when placed under restraint he should not have to herd with ordinary landholders.

The Rajah of Sultanabad, in the wild days before the coming of the British, maintained armies, manned largely by the Highlanders of the neighbouring hills, and waged war.

There is a place at the mouth of one of the passes called Rajamara—the place where a king was killed—whose name is said to commemorate a battle between the Rajah of Sultanabad and the

Khetowrie Rajah of Hendwai, in which battle one of the two kings fell. And the Rajah of Sultanabad had deep in his jungle a city of hiding—Debinagar—whither he could flee when politics became too hot for him in the Nawab's court at Moorshedabad. Thus at the time of the Permanent Settlement, in 1790, every part of this threefold territory was occupied, and men were busy in their various ways.

Time passed. A new century began. The Rajah of Nagore went down under the weight of the Permanent Settlement. His wide domains were sent to the hammer, and bought by a new man, the Rajah of Hetampore, who proceeded to destroy the ancient Ghatwali tenures which interfered with his profits. This process was stopped by a special law securing the Ghatwals who still survived in their rights for the future.

High priest and subordinate priests carried on their never-ending wrangle over the revenues and management of the temple of Baidyanath. In the Hill tract one superintendent succeeded another. So little was the superintendent for the time being interfered with that he became a sort of king; and at last a Mahomedan who held the office began to dream of converting the whole Hill tract into a private estate of his own.

But what of the Sonthals? Where were they?

That is the wonderful part of the story. So far as we know, at the time of the Permanent Settlement there was not a single Sonthal in the whole

of this area. Bhunyas, Khetowries, Hindoos, Mahomedans, Highlanders—yes, but Sonthals—no.

The first mention of Sonthals having entered this area is in the report of Mr. Sutherland, Joint Magistrate of Bhaugulpore, who was sent about the year 1820 to inquire into the state of the Hill tracts and the doings of the “Khan Sahib.” He found that there had begun to filter into the Hill tracts men of a new and hitherto unheard-of race, called “Sonthals” or “Soutars,” who were reputed to be excellent pioneers. They had first been heard of in this District, he says, about the year 1810, and had come in from the south-west. As a Bhaugulpore man, he would not take much interest in Beerbhoom affairs; and Sonthals may have appeared earlier in Beerbhoom. Not much earlier, however, for their traditional northern boundary was the Damoodar, their sacred river, and that is well south of the old Beerbhoom boundary. Their original home was far south. I had seen some of them in Midnapore. Keeping to the red soil and the jungle, they spread north, till at last, as has been said, their vanguard arrived within sight of the Hill tract about the year 1810.

They came as tenants of the landowners, reclaiming waste land, and ousting no man. Up to the year 1835 they were excluded from the Hill tracts, whose glens and valleys were for half a century kept empty that the Highlanders might come down and cultivate. But as the Highlanders were evidently not coming down, the Sonthals

were allowed to flow into it. Being prolific, industrious, and hardy, they multiplied and spread. They paid rent; they asked for no subsidies, for no protection—only to be let alone. But they were not let alone. The Police and the money-lenders worried them into rebellion. They rose, and were crushed after a war which began by their beating off the Hill Rangers, now a regiment of the regular army, armed with muskets.

Surely this, men said, was the end. This troublesome new people would be turned out of the land they had taken, and driven away.

But an amazing thing happened. A people, without fighting, without dispossessing others, without patrons, without railways, roads, waterways, capital, book-learning, science, or firearms, had within less than fifty years so completely established themselves in a land already occupied by races reputed older, more civilised, warlike, and powerful than themselves, that this great tract of 5400 square miles was in the year 1855 plucked from the Districts to which its parts had belonged, formed into a new District, named after the Sonthals, and given a constitution specially devised for their benefit, to be administered by special officers.

It was not the first constitution specially devised for a particular race. The same thing had been done seventy years before for the Highlanders, but with a difference. The Highlanders, when they got their constitution, had hitherto owed no obedience to the general law of the land: the



Sonthals were subjects of the Government, owing obedience to its laws. The Highlanders had lived on their hills from time immemorial; they had to be weaned from their old marauding habits, taught habits of industry, and coerced into leading a more law-abiding life. The Sonthals had no ancient rights in the land. They had come in on sufferance. They were already law-abiding and industrious (if we except the rebellion). They supported themselves, and needed no help.

The Highlanders were the only inhabitants of the Hill tracts when they got their constitution. It affected nobody but themselves. People of other races who entered the Hill tracts—the Sonthals included—were not put under it. The Sonthals were a minority of the people. They owned none of the land; they did not trade; they were looked down upon by the other inhabitants as little better than beasts. They had not even a reputation as fighting men; and, if they had had any, they lost it in the rebellion. They had been living for fifty years under the ordinary law of the land. Yet for their sakes a new constitution was devised, to which not only they but all the other inhabitants were made subject.

I call this a wonderful turn of events. There is nothing like it in all history.

## II

### A NEW SYSTEM

THE new constitution was initiated by a short measure describing and naming the Sonthal Pergunnahs; withdrawing from it all ordinary laws except those specially extended to it, and appointing a Commissioner to administer it. For this duty the Commissioner of the existing "Division" of Bhaugulpore was chosen. His "Division" or group of Districts, like the Divisions to which belonged the Districts of Beerbhoom and Moorshedabad, was all Regulation. Of the peoples in the new Sonthal Pergunnahs the only section who had hitherto been under a non-Regulation system were the Highlanders. Henceforth the whole of the Sonthal Pergunnahs was to be non-Regulation.

What, it will be asked, is Regulation, and what non-Regulation? In every form of Government there are two elements—the man and the machine. In Regulation, machine dominates; in non-Regulation, man. The motives of both systems may be equally good, but in the one "the Sabbath was made for man," in the other "man for the Sabbath."

Let me explain what I mean by two actual instances. When the Sonthal Pergunnahs was over thirty years old, and I was District Officer, we were carrying on a controversy as to whether the regular Police, which had been partially introduced into the District, should be extended to the whole District. I was talking to the Deputy Inspector-General of Police in Bengal. Arguing against his views, I said I was sure that for many years to come the Government would refuse to introduce his department into the Damin-i-koh, as the Hill reserve—the home of Highlanders and Sonthals—was called.

“Then,” said he, “why not give us the rest?”

“There are tracts outside the Damin,” I replied, “where the Sonthal population is almost as dense as within it.”

“Then,” said he, “why can’t the Sonthals be all moved into the Damin, and leave the rest of the District to us?”

So far as I could judge, this was said, not as a joke, but in sober earnest. Now that was “man for the Sabbath” with a vengeance. He was proposing that several hundreds of thousands of people should be turned out of their homes and their land, and forced into a land already full, all to facilitate the extension of his particular system of Police.

Here, now, is the other instance. In the early days of the Sonthal Pergunnahs, a settlement of rents was being made with the Sonthals of the

Damin, who were tenants of the Government. The officers in charge of the work were under strict orders not to close without first taking the opinion of the higher authorities. One officer, however, finding that the people were willing to give more than he knew the Government was willing to take, closed the bargain and reported what he had done. His immediate superior, the Deputy Commissioner, horrified at this disobedience to orders, informed the Commissioner of it. The Commissioner came to the settlement camp, went into the matter, and then said :

“ Well, Smith, I find it’s quite true. You’ve broken the rules. But we can change the rules.” And changed the rules were.

This is “the Sabbath for man.”

Laws and regulations which govern scores of millions of people necessarily take little account of local or race peculiarities. For localities or races having peculiarities, especially those reputed backward, such, for instance, as the western frontier Districts of Bengal, the policy adopted was to introduce into their administration a large portion of the element of human discretion, first by the Government taking to itself the power of extending to or withdrawing from them such of the ordinary laws as it believed suitable or unsuitable to local circumstances ; second, by enacting special measures applying to them alone ; and, third, by giving to the officers administering the law and rules a wide discretion in the application of them.

Such a system gives more trouble, and is, perhaps, more costly than the machine system; for it demands more intelligence in administration. A man can order his clerk to look up a rule and draft an order; but if he is to exercise discretion, he must do that himself.

A non-Regulation system administered without intelligence is apt to degenerate into something with all the defects and none of the advantages of Regulation. As the pick of the intelligence in the Government service, in Bengal, was generally reserved for "Regulation" work, and any one, in the subordinate ranks at any rate, was thought good enough for non-Regulation, it was the fashion in Bengal to regard the former as the superior type, which all good "non-Regulation" Districts should aspire some day to become fit for.

Having seen not a little of both, I am a heretic in this matter. I regard "non-Regulation" as the superior type. The British system under which I was brought up is eminently non-Regulation, and is still the model Government of the world.

But I am wandering into opinion. Let us get back to facts.

When I said that the Sonthal Pergunnahs began as a District in 1855, that was not strictly correct, for they were a Division—a group of four Districts—Doomka, Godda, Rajmahal, and Deoghur. The four officers in charge, the Deputy and three Assistant Commissioners, were all directly under the Commissioner, though the first exercised

some supervision over the other three. Each of the four had a second officer to help him ; and the eight constituted the "Sonthal Commission." They were all Europeans. The number of natives fit for work of the kind they had was at that time small, and the Sonthal of those days had a profound distrust of natives. All his enemies, who had goaded him into rebellion—the money-lender, the Police Darogah, the Court clerk, the process peon, and the lawyer, were Hindoos or Mahomedans ; and he confounded all men of those races, of whatever caste, country, or creed, under the one word "*Dikkoo*," and held all alike in abhorrence. He liked and trusted Europeans. Therefore these eight "Hakims" (givers of orders) were appointed to be the sole representatives of the Government among the people, the only persons with authority over them. It is to be noted that previously there had been many "Hakims," but all far away at Bhaugulpore, Moorshedabad, and Beerbhoom ; and of various kinds—one for revenue, another for criminal justice, another for civil justice. The "Hakims," except the superintendent of the Hill tracts, whose business was chiefly with the Highlanders (for the Sonthals of the Damini were under the ordinary law), had never appeared in those parts at all. They were represented by Darogahs, process-servers, and other underlings, whom the Sonthals hated and feared.

All this fringe of underlings was to be utterly done away with, and for the elaborate, clumsy,

and discredited machinery of administration that had been before, was substituted the one instrument—the “Hakim”; one “Hakim” for each District, with a junior to help him.

I believe that at the beginning there was hardly a clerk in the District.

The inspiring genius of this new system was the Commissioner, George Yule. As for Deputy Commissioners, he had three in quick succession. Ashley Eden, who had helped in the suppression of the rebellion, and who afterwards became Lieutenant-Governor, was the first. He stayed only a month, and then his health broke down. He was replaced by Rivers Thompson, who afterwards succeeded him as Lieutenant-Governor. Thompson stayed a year, and was succeeded by Le Fleming Robinson, an admirer of Yule, so devoted that, they said, if Yule came out with a patch on his trousers, Robinson would have a patch like it on his, next day.

Yule and these three were the brains of the new Sonthal Commission. Everything was to do—houses to be built and rules made for procedure, but the most urgent work of all was to clear away the wreck of the rebellion.

Thompson built his house at Doomka,—beautiful, healthy, and out of the world. Many years after, he told me how the rebels were kept under guard in open enclosures, there being no jails, and how he tried them in batches, punishing criminals and letting the rest go.

Police rules were prepared. It was some time before they were passed, and meantime the "Hakims" did their work without written rules of any kind. The rules, when finally issued, no doubt embodied their experience.

To provide food for the starving people, relief works were started—the chief work being the military road from Bhaugulpore to Beerbhoom.

The District Officer was independent of roads. Simple rest-houses of mud and thatch were maintained at convenient points. When he wanted to travel, he got on his elephant with orderly and baggage, and set off through the jungle.

Justice was informal. There was no distinction between civil and criminal Courts, no Government Police, no lawyers, clerks, or process-servers; no fees.

In his Court-room, or on the roadside under a tree, the "Hakim" received the complaint made verbally: sent the plaintiff to fetch the defendant, and there and then they had it out.

The result was put down on a scrap of paper and given to the successful party, who, if there was a decree to execute, was told to execute his own decree.

The headman of each village—Manjhi, as the Sonthals called him, or "Mondle," as the Bengalis did, was its Police officer. If the "Mondle" was the landlord's servant, then a Police "Mondle" was also appointed.

The head of a "bazaar," a place where there



were shops and a market, was called "Choudhry." These "Manjhies," "Mondles," and "Choudhries" represented the people, as the "Hakim" did the Government, and between them and the "Hakim" the whole work of administration was expected to be done. A thief, when such a rare bird was caught, was tied up by the village "Manjhi," and trotted off with the witnesses to the "Hakim," who disposed of the case there and then.

Important cases, too heavy for the "Manjhi," were investigated by a "Hakim."

The "Hakims" seem to have got very quickly into touch with the Sonthals, whom they found wandering about, homeless and desperate, in large bands, but soon had settled back quietly in their villages.

The great object of the system was to keep the Sonthals in touch, and this was ensured by having *constant* *contact* *between* the "Hakim" and his people. Everything that would tie the "Hakim" down and prevent his moving about freely was avoided. Heavy civil suits—that is, those valued at over 1000 rupees—were left to be tried by the judicial officers of the outside Districts, and office work was kept down to a minimum.

All this arrangement was plainly temporary and provisional. It was admirably adapted to inspire confidence and for the restoration of order, but could not last. Either as, I think, Yule intended, the new system would have to be developed, or as, I think, others intended, it would have to be laid

aside when the work of pacification should be complete.

Very early in the life of the system there came a rude interruption in the great Mutiny. Though taken part in by some of the regiments that had been brought in to suppress the rebellion, still stationed in the Sonthal Pergunnahs or on their borders, the Mutiny does not seem to have touched the Sonthals perceptibly. Its chief bad effect was to draw Yule's attention off to other matters, and then to take him away entirely ; for he was chosen to be Chief Commissioner of the newly-recovered provinces of Oudh.

### III

## CHANGES

It is my purpose in this and the following two chapters to relate a few of the more important events that occurred between the time of Yule and the time when I first knew the Sonthal Pergunnahs.

Of Yule's successors the most outstanding was Alonzo Money, who afterwards went to Egypt.

Just before his time the new Police Act had come into force. The department, naturally anxious to push in whenever it could, sought entrance into the Sonthal Pergunnahs. Mr. Money resisted, but was overruled, and had to yield to its introduction into the Deoghur District (corresponding to the present Deoghur and Jamtara subdivisions). He succeeded in saving the right of the "Manjhi" to take up his cases direct to the "Hakim."

In his time also a "settlement" of rents was made in the Damin with the Sonthal tenants of Government. The Highlanders never paid rents, and it was greatly feared that the Sonthals

would take alarm at anything like measurement. So the suggestion of William Smith—that the rent should be assessed roughly according to the number of ploughs—was acted on. He on the east, and Blumhardt on the west side, carried out the settlement successfully. It was Smith who broke the rules, as related above, and Money who changed them to suit Smith's action.

The opening of the loop line of the East India Railway, which was under construction at the time of the Sonthal rebellion, and of the chord line in 1866, materially changed the balance of work, adding to it all over the District, but especially on the east and west sides near the railway. The Deputy Commissioner, who had been relieved of the direct charge of a subdivision, spent a good deal of his time at Bhaugulpore, and Deoghur seemed destined to take the place of Doomka as the metropolis of the Sonthal Pergunnahs. The District Superintendent and the Doctor both lived here. Doomka and Godda were left each in charge of an Assistant Commissioner, and out-posts were started at Pakour on the loop and Jamtara on the chord line.

On the introduction of the new Police, the regiment of Hill Rangers, after a life of about eighty years, was disbanded.

The rebellion had proved that it was no longer strong enough to keep the peace unaided in the Damini with its large Sonthal population; and it was no longer needed for the Highlanders. Forays

were things of the past, and petty thefts were better dealt with by the village Police. In my rounds a quarter of a century later, I used to come across old soldiers of the regiment, who would occasionally turn out for parade. One or two had even preserved a cap or a red tunic of their old uniform. With the muskets of my Police guard for a few, and staves for the rest, they went through, before an admiring crowd of Highlanders and Sonthals, to the hoarse word of command of their veteran Jemadar, the stiff evolutions of the days of Brown Bess. It was pathetic to see the dim eyes light up, the bowed figures straighten out, as with head erect and eyes front they closed up in the old familiar drill. For a few minutes their youth came back to them, and they lived in the past.

After Yule's departure things got worse—how, it would be tedious to explain in detail. The work grew heavier, and the staff was not strengthened in proportion. The system was not developed: its development seemed to be scarcely worth while; for in the strong Regulation atmosphere of the Government of the day—the Government which was put to shame by the Orissa famine—the prevailing opinion seems to have been that the Sonthal system was bound to come to an end, and the Sonthal Pergunnahs to be “wheeled into line.” It seems to have been considered a crowning proof of good administration that that happy event should be brought nearer. The rough-and-

ready ways of the "Hakims" were discarded, and the procedure gradually became more formal and elaborate—like that of the Civil Courts outside. There was in the system more machine and less man than in the days of Yule.

And then the alarm sounded—again from the Sonthal hamlets. Their grievance in the great rebellion had been money-lenders, Police and Law Courts; and the disturbance was worst in the Damin, where there were no landlords. Now the grievance was the landlords; and the disturbance was not in the Damin, but outside.

The Sonthal village paid its rent through the "Manjhi," or head-man, who, as the founder, or founder's representative, was its chief, and could no more be divorced from it than the father can be from his family. The landlords had begun to put up the office of "Manjhi" for sale, as if it had been a tenancy created by them, and Sonthal villages began to be bought and sold by "Dikkoo" speculators. The hated "Dikkoo"—the Hindoo alien—was thrust on the village as its temporary owner, and took advantage of his position, after his manner, to make things unpleasant for his Sonthal tenants. So once more "buzz was the word" among the Sonthals. The drums rumbled in every village, and men said that the Sonthals were out for another "hool" (rising).

The Lieutenant-Governor of the day was Sir George Campbell, a non-Regulation man from the

Punjaub, with all the moral robustness of one brought up in the school of the Lawrences. His breezy influence blew on the Sonthal Commission, and revived in them the fainting spirit of Yule. In his mind, at least, there was no doubt that Yule's system was the thing for the Sonthal Pergunnahs, and he did much to bring the system back to what Yule intended.

He insisted that the "Hakims" should cease from aping the Civil Courts. He decided that the District should be no longer four, but one; and that the Deputy Commissioner should live at Doomka, its centre. He withdrew the regular Police from Jamtara; made that and Pakour into outposts of Doomka; and did what he could to restore the old rough-and-ready simplicity of Yule's day.

As a necessary remedial measure he laid before the Government of India a new law for the settlement of rents and for making a Record of Rights throughout the Sonthal Pergunnahs. This was twelve years ahead of the Bengal Tenancy Act, and was looked on as a drastic measure. The Government of India hesitated.

"Very well," said Sir George, "you must either give me this, or soldiers to shoot these people. I don't care which."

He got his law.

Of the Census of 1872 I do not remember reading anything. I suppose it was almost the last ordinary District work carried out by the "Hakims"

of the Sonthal Commission, whom the people knew, and there would accordingly be little fuss.

The famine of 1874 was managed in Bengal with lavish expenditure, and, in the Sonthal Pergunnahs at least, little "bundobust." The word "bundobust" in India is one which we could not do without. It has no English equivalent, though "arrangement" comes near it.

In famine work, it means a careful watch for symptoms; prompt testing of them when they appear; a full special staff to deal with relief work, should it be decided on; a sufficient list of suitable relief works for each locality, with detailed plans and estimates ready for use. In 1874 the Sonthal Pergunnahs had none of these.

I will give two instances of how things were sometimes managed in those days. The engineer had been a railway man, and was ordered to make a road as a relief work. A great part of the line was over a level plain, where a fairly good road might have been got by nicking a boundary line on either side. But that would not give work; and so the engineer started a series of cuttings and embankments on the level plain. Well, they gave work certainly, but when I travelled that way in after days, the only part of the plain one could not have driven over was the famine road.

Frederick Grant was sent as "Hakim" to Godda just as the famine began, and on the way there he received his instructions from the



Commissioner at Bhaugulpore. On a map the Commissioner drew with a pencil a line from Godda to Pirpointi, a distance of forty miles, thirty of which were in the Godda subdivision.

"You are to make a road along this line," said he. "You are to spend a lakh (100,000) of rupees on it; and you must begin at once, for relief is urgently wanted."

That was all. Neither the Commissioner nor Grant had seen the line of the proposed road, nor was there in existence any record of survey, any plan or estimate. Grant was not to be relieved of his ordinary work or to get any special staff for this.

Frederick Grant was not one to make difficulties. He spent his lakh of rupees, and made his road, though in the circumstances it could hardly be expected to be of permanent use. And then, though he had been denied help for keeping his accounts, a clerk was sent down after the work was over to audit them!

"You are 500 rupees out," was the clerk's verdict.

"Is that all!" exclaimed Grant, relieved to find that it was not more. "Take it, take it, and go away at once! Don't let me see any more of you!"

Dear old Frederick Grant! In him there was more man than machine. Besides having to make the road, he had to keep a store of rice. When the famine was declared closed, he was directed

to sell the rice that was over for what it would fetch ; and, as he once told me, so ashamed was he of the low price it was selling at that he bought in five hundred maunds (about 18 tons) on his own account, and fed the poor with it for a year after.

## IV

### THE SETTLEMENT

THE famine soon passed. The settlement was a weightier matter.

Under Sir George Campbell's new arrangement, no civil suit, even if valued at over 1000 rupees, went outside the District for trial. This put a stop to one serious evil—the trial of suits connected with the traffic in village offices before tribunals ignorant of local conditions.

To carry out the work of settlement, two documents—a Record of Rights and a rent-roll—had to be prepared for each of the 8000 villages of the Sonthal Pergunnahs—a gigantic task; yet so little was its magnitude realised, or so greatly were the powers of the “Hakims” overrated, that the first intention was to make the ordinary staff carry out the settlement, in addition to their usual work, without help.

A beginning was made in Godda with the much-derided “Nazarpaimaish,” or “Survey at a glance.” It was thus managed.

First the “Hakim” fixed on the classes of land—usually three for rice land (here the most valu-

able) and two for the higher land. It was one of the Sonthals' contentions that they should pay rent for rice land only. This was overruled as unfair, though the rates for high lands were very low.

Rates were fixed, as far as possible, according to custom, when that could be ascertained. Then from the back of his elephant, or some other commanding height, the "Hakim" viewed the village fields, and estimated by guess how much land of each class there was in the village.

The rental was then calculated from these figures and the rates, and compared with the rent being actually paid. If the rise seemed too much or too little, the estimated areas were manipulated either by altering the acreage or by redistributing it among the classes. By this method many villages could be surveyed cheaply and quickly.

Before long it became evident that a separate settlement staff would be needed, especially in view of impending famine. Accordingly Mr. Browne Wood, who had been Deputy Commissioner for an unknown number of years, was appointed Settlement Officer, acting directly under the Commissioner, and the pick of his "Hakims" were given to him as assistants. He and they were replaced in the District staff.

John Boxwell was the new Deputy Commissioner, and Frederick Grant, already mentioned, was one of the new "Hakims." The main object

of the settlement was to *settle*. Accuracy was not so important as finality. It had to be carried out *cheaply*, for, in the first place, the Government was bearing the expense, and in the second, the rates of rent were too low to justify the cost of a detailed survey.

A survey involved a swarm of surveyors and blackmail. The Sonthals, moreover, were opposed to a survey. No such thing had yet been ventured on, even in the Damin. For all these reasons, it was thought better to make an honest guess, at the risk of being wrong (indeed some of the guesses were wild), and stick to it, than to involve every one in great expense, cause great delay, and incur much odium in the attempt to ascertain the exact truth by a survey.

So the much laughed at "Survey at a glance" was not so absurd as it seemed.

The valuable part of the settlement was the Record of Rights. Its main value consisted in this, that no Court of Law was entitled to question any entry in it of the rights of landlord or tenant.

The Record was conclusive proof of any fact stated in it. There was for each village a separate Record, of which a copy was given to the landlord, and another to the head of the village. For every village a rent-roll was ordered to be prepared, distributing among the tenants the lump-rent fixed by the Settlement Officer.

For this purpose the law required that a village "punchayet" should be appointed. The "puncha-

yet" was a fashionable expedient at this time, when punchayets for assessing the village watch fund were being spread broadcast all over Bengal.

In a great many villages of Godda the plan broke down owing to the refusal of villagers to serve in the punchayets. Mr. Frederick Grant, the Subdivisional Officer, was accordingly deputed to frame rent-rolls for those villages.

Many years after, the settlement expert of the Government was in Doomka in connection with a revision of this first settlement, whose term had expired. For a long time he would not believe that there were no survey records of the settlement, it seemed so incredible that a settlement should have been carried out without some sort of a survey; and in despair he asked if there was not still in the District some one connected with the settlement who could give information on the point. No one, he was told, but Mr. Grant. So Mr. Grant was consulted.

*Expert.* "Mr. Grant, I hear you were in the settlement."

*Mr. Grant.* "Not exactly, but I framed rent-rolls."

*Expert.* "Of course, to be able to do this you made measurements?"

*Mr. Grant.* "Yes."

*Expert.* "And there were papers?"

*Grant.* "Yes."

*Expert.* "At last I have something tangible! Where are the papers?"

*Grant.* "There are none now."

*Expert.* "Why, what did you do with them?"

*Grant.* "I burnt them all!"

*Expert.* "Burnt them! Monstrous! What on earth made you do a thing so outrageous?"

*Grant.* "My orders were to do nothing to discredit the settlement, and my figures came out so different from the settlement figures that I burnt them to save the credit of the settlement."

Clearly, in the interests of finality, this was the right thing to do.

Though I was not present at the scene, I can imagine the wild explosion with which the words, "I burnt them!" burst from Grant's lips, and the look of hopeless amazement with which the expert threw himself back in his chair. The expert, who afterwards became a high official in Ireland, must often have thought of that day.

Grant, a broad-backed, tall, burly man, had a squeaky voice, which in moments of excitement became falsetto; a big round face, clean shaven, except for a little close-clipt moustache—the face of a "Mossoo." He wore spectacles, and was prone, like all "Hakims" who have lived much with Sonthals, to gestures, especially that excited fling out of the right hand with which the Sonthal is accustomed to preface any specially energetic remark.

Though no detailed survey was made save in a few villages, the "Survey at a glance" was soon abandoned as too vague, and a sort of modified

survey was made of each village by taking it in blocks.

The settlement was made estate by estate. The whole District was got through by the year 1879, the last part taken up being the "Damin." With all its imperfections (and it had many) the settlement left behind it a very much better state of things than it found. In all but a few Bengali villages, where it was customary for the landlord to deal with the individual tenant, it established, or rather confirmed, a representative head of the village. As this man was also Police Magistrate for the villages, the settlement gave to the tenantry that great and precious gift which a year or two later I was trying to get for the tenantry in Serampore—the *key of their own door*.

Then it fixed the rent for a term of years. The oppressive practice of renewing the lease every year or two with a heavy premium, and perhaps a large increase at every renewal, was put a stop to.

Then in the rent-roll the exact rent payable by each tenant was fixed. All those fines, tips, and exactions of various kinds (I forget how many, but not less than fifteen kinds had been enumerated), whereby the tenant's nominal rent was usually doubled, were disallowed.

Tenants' rights of holding, at a fixed rent, of grazing, fishing, taking wood, etc., were fully recorded. But the crowning benefit, though sometimes it worked harshly, was the *finality*. I say it



worked harshly, for at least in one of the estates which were the first to be settled the work was done most incorrectly, and resulted in the ruin of the proprietors. But this was an exceptional case : and when many proprietors were ruining themselves in many ways, the ruin of one in this way, though regrettable, was no great matter.

To prevent injustice, the Deputy Commissioner had power, if he thought proper, to reopen the Record of Rights, of which the rent-roll was a part. But he could only touch the rent-roll if he had reason to believe that it had been prepared fraudulently.

When I came to the Sonthal Pergunnahs I found that one of my predecessors had two years or so before reopened the rent-roll of a certain village in Godda—a large village with many tenants and a heavy rent-roll. Some tenants had complained that certain holders of land in the village not entitled to it had got exemption in the rent-roll from the payment of their just share of the village rent. This, it was alleged, made the shares of the others too heavy, and the rent-roll unjust. The exempted tenants being called, replied that they were not liable to pay rent, as they gave service to the landlord instead. The Deputy Commissioner thought proper to reopen the settlement and investigate the matter. And a fine tangle of issues we had to unravel ! I believe the whole village was measured field by field, twice over, by the official surveyor, who got out different figures

each time; and all his figures were hopelessly different from those of the settlement. I found the matter pending, and on my first visit to Godda took the papers with me. On talking over the case with Mr. Grant, still at Godda, I found that things were very bad in the village. The head-man was getting no rent; the landlord was pressing him and getting decrees against him; and before long the poor man must be ruined.

I found also that the rent-roll was one of those framed by Mr. Grant himself, and there could be no question of his honesty. I therefore called up the villagers, confirmed the rent-roll and closed the inquiry.

At once confusion ceased, the head-man got his rent, the landlord was paid, and there was peace. This incident impressed very strongly on my mind that there are few things better than finality.

Before, however, it reached finality the settlement had an ordeal to go through. A time was fixed after the date of the publication of the Record within which suits to set aside the settlement might be brought; and these suits must be heard and disposed of.

At first the Settlement Officers disposed of their own suits. They soon, however, complained that, having passed on to other estates they found it most inconvenient to take these cases up; so it ended in the suits being all turned over to the ordinary staff for trial.

The suits were troublesome and complicated.

The Record touched questions of title, affecting owners as well as tenants, many of which had been the subject of smouldering contention. This was blown into a blaze by the settlement; for if the Record was to be opposed, it must be now or never. The pile of work thrown thus on the ordinary Courts was enormous, quite overwhelming them for the time, and preventing them from giving proper attention to their own duties. One year the Government ordered the whole staff to abandon their season's tours, sit at home and clear off the arrears.

Mr. Boxwell's frequent protests also testify to the fact that the judicial work was breaking his own heart and that of his officers.

The settlement had many consequences, good and bad; but we must now pass to other matters.

## V

### THE CENSUS OF 1881

It was about the beginning of the settlement that Sir Richard Temple, who succeeded Sir George Campbell as Lieutenant-Governor, snapped a link with the past: he abolished the Sonthal Commission. By a stroke of the pen all the Assistant Commissioners of the Sonthal Pergunnahs were turned into Deputy Magistrates, and thenceforth their names appeared in the Civil list mixed with those of several hundreds of others, nearly all natives of India.

I am not aware if any actual injustice was done: it all happened ten years before I went to the Sonthal Pergunnahs. I know that it made sore hearts.

The Assistant Commissioner had a prospect, more or less remote, of becoming a Deputy Commissioner—Mr. Grant had already acted as one in Julpaigori, and enjoyed the dignity that belongs to a man with prospects. The prospect was taken away, so far as I know, without compensation. No doubt the change was made for good reasons; yet the treatment of these particular servants of

the State does seem to me to have been needlessly cynical and inconsiderate. Mr. Boxwell was a new man to the Sonthal Pergunnahs, and, so far as I know, to non-Regulation. He had come to a District where the Government was just beginning a mighty effort to stave off rebellion and slaughter by a big reform. The situation was not easy. For guidance he had the "spirit of the Regulations" and the Police rules of Yule.

I forget whether he drafted the Civil rules for the trial of suits under 1000 rupees, or whether he found them.

And then he had the new settlement law, the most important of whose provisions outside those for the settlement was the usury clause.

In the fifties, just before the creation of the Sonthal Pergunnahs, in obedience, it may be supposed, to the call of advancing civilisation, an Act restricting usury, which had up to that time existed, was removed from the statute book of India. The "Hakims" in the Sonthal Pergunnahs, however, used their broad discretion to discourage extortionate contracts. Thus Le Fleming Robinson issued a circular bidding his officers flog any usurer who was found to have taken a "Kamiati bond." Mr. Yule saw this order and disapproved of it as too strong, whereupon Mr. Robinson issued another circular to say that the men were not to be flogged.

What, it will be asked, is a "Kamiati" bond?

I happened myself to meet with one. Twenty

years before a man had lent five rupees to a neighbour, who bound himself to work for the creditor in lieu of interest until the debt should be paid off. That was a "Kamiati bond." After twenty years we found the son of the debtor still working for the son of the creditor in lieu of interest, and the five rupees still owing.

The usury clause was intended to check the usurers, as the settlement was to check the landlords. The check was threefold—no compound interest, a maximum rate of 25 per cent per annum, and interest never to exceed principal. This means that if 100 rupees were the loan, the utmost sum recoverable on it would be 200 rupees after four years. It became the chief business of Mr. Boxwell and his "Hakims" to enforce that law.

The money-lenders, needless to say, endeavoured to evade it. It may seem to give fair latitude, but in fact it cut at the root of their whole system, which was based on the principle of the "Kamiati bond"—a small investment to yield a large perennial income. The key of the position lay in the right, claimed successfully for the Courts by Mr. Boxwell, of "*unripping*" bonds, which means, going back behind the paper before the Court to see how it has been arrived at. For one of the usurer's many tricks to get round the law was, when the full legal interest of a debt had accrued, to take a fresh bond entering the whole debt, principal and interest, as consideration—

which he claimed, on the strength of the debtor having signed it, as a fresh starting-point for interest to accrue.

Mr. Boxwell would not have this, as it was contrary to the usury clause. Even when the High Court took sides against him, he stuck to his guns and carried his point.

But his very success in checking the usurers at this point turned their attention to another way of circumventing the law—a way opened to them, oddly enough, by the check which the settlement put on the landlords. For the settlement, by defining the village rights, gave the tenants, and especially the head-men, something which they thought they could mortgage or sell; and they began mortgaging and selling to the usurers. The usurers had hitherto been content with money or grain. Their running accounts and bonds had provided them with a sufficient lever to force out of their debtors whatever their debtors had to give them. The action of the usury clause rendered this sort of lever unsatisfactory, so they resorted to another. They began to get possession of the land itself. The thing was not done in a corner. Mortgage deeds were executed and registered, and mortgages began to be foreclosed. There came a day even when a usurer sued in Court to foreclose a mortgage and get a decree; and when another sought to have a tenant's land put up for sale to satisfy a debt, and what he asked for was done. Mr. Boxwell himself was deceived, con-

gratulating the Administration on the additional borrowing powers that the tenants had acquired through the settlement.

Before the end of the settlement he went away, and was succeeded by Mr. Oldham, but already he had seen the real drift of this new move of the usurers to get round his flank ; for of the tenants who had sold, and whom he imagined to have gone elsewhere, perhaps as emigrants to Assam, he found that the majority were cultivating their old fields as drudges of their creditor, working out, in fact if not in name, a never-ending “Kamiat bond” ; some were scraping a bare living out of the worthless part of their land from which the creditor had taken the plum ; and nearly all the rest were hanging about their villages—landless, starving, and dangerous.

The village chiefs—the guardians of the village rights—were being entangled in the snares of the usurers’ mortgage bonds, and the usurers were thereby possessing themselves of the key of the village door.

The door locked, and the burglar inside with the key in his pocket ! The usurer could take his will of the village once he had the “Manjhi” in his grip.

I am not very clear as to dates, but I think this was about the time when a great “Kherwar” movement began among the Sonthals. The Kherwars were a sort of Puritan sect among the Sonthals,



as the Wahabis were among the Mahomedans, who had ideas of an independent "Raj" or kingdom of their own. They renounced the eating of meat and the drinking of liquor, and one of the first signs of their advent was the killing of the fowls.

One of their leaders was a fanatic named Bhagirath, who made himself dangerous by getting the Sonthals together in mobs, and exciting them with vague dreams of independence. It was Grant who arrested Bhagirath. He was in camp, opposite Pirpointi station on the East India Railway, when Bhagirath, with a mob of several thousand Sonthals, made his appearance on the hillside opposite. Grant had a weak guard of constables armed with worm-eaten muskets. He sat on his chair, in the door of his tent, and sent for Bhagirath. Bhagirath came, while the whole great body of his followers looked on to see that no harm befell their leader.

Under their eye, but out of earshot, Grant went through the process of trying Bhagirath, and at the exact time when he thought they would be able to catch the train for Bhaugulpore, he concluded the trial, and sent off Bhagirath to Pirpointi with some of his slender guard. As they moved off over the plain he sat still in his tent door and waited. Presently came a deputation from the vast assembly of Sonthals to know what had become of their leader. He was gone, said the "Hakim," to Bhaugulpore, where the Commissioner

wished to consult him; and the deputation went back to tell their friends the answer.

Grant sat still and waited again to see if his story was believed. If it was not, that meant his death. Fortunately his answer found favour, and the people dispersed to their homes. Grant's quiet courage had brought him safely out of a very tight place.

Boxwell's great powers had hardly a fair chance while he was at Doomka, for he and his officers were driven very hard to get through their judicial work. His successor, Mr. Oldham, and I who succeeded Mr. Oldham after an interval, regarded his judgments as a storehouse from which to take the correct principles of Sonthal law. He grasped the spirit of Yule's system and thoroughly believed in it. He was quite ready, if given a band of efficient "Hakims" and time for the work, to govern the Sonthal Pergunnahs cheaply and well. But it was not to be. Browne Wood had some of the old Hakims for the settlement; Sir Richard Temple had destroyed the Commission; and he and the men left him were forced to neglect the work of governing and wear themselves out over other work. He loved the Sonthals, and they loved him. They regard their "Hakims" as *men*, not as *machines*, and knew them by their names, not by their titles. Of all the names in their calendar—of all the "Hakims" whom they love to remember—the name of "Baxwen" is the one they honour most and cherish best.

He was very tall, with a stoop and a lovable Irish face—untidy in his ways, unmethodical in his work, as he himself admitted. He was a lover of trees almost to superstition. To him it was as great a crime to cut off a branch as to amputate a human limb. When he was making a road (he was a great road-maker) he would often turn it aside from the straight line to save a tree; or, if that were inconvenient, he would leave the tree standing right in the middle. I have now and then met a tree blocking the road—an old gnarled mohwa or a mango—and it was sure to be one of his roads.

Not even in his own time did his views always prevail.

In Doomka, at a corner by his own gateway, standing out in the road, was a tree. It was in everybody's way. Boxwell himself, I believe, had knocked against it with his trap. But he would not hear of its being touched. William Smith was the Subdivisional Officer, and with a twinkle in his eye he has told me how once upon a time, when Boxwell was away on tour, he had the tree carefully rooted up, and the place smoothed down, so that no trace of it remained. Boxwell, after coming back, passed the corner again and again, looking vacantly about as if missing something, but what, he could not think. All at once he turned on Smith, and shook his fist. "Ah, you rascal!" he exclaimed, "*now* I know! This is *your* doing!"

I believe it is to his love of trees that we owe the revival of our forests in the Sonthal Pergunnahs. The principal forest that we have is in the South Damin. Early in his time he saw during the famine of 1874 what a standby the "mohwa" tree, with its edible flowers, is to the people when the grain crops fail; and his zeal for preserving trees was probably stimulated to fanaticism by the zeal of the Sonthals for their destruction—a virtue in pioneers, but ruin to a settled country.

He was a great road-maker. The two of his roads that I know best are that to Rampore Hat on the loop line, which is still Doomka's main outlet, and that to Godda. This last he succeeded in carrying all the fifty miles along a ridge without having to cross a single watercourse.

But his plans are not all successful. In the South Damin, in the forest, I was shown a nearly empty embankment, which was known as "Boxwell's folly." There was to have been a great lake here, but the hill-side was porous, and would not hold in the water.

He was beloved not only by the Sonthals, but by his officers. He drove them; he scolded them; but he was intensely loyal to them, defending them from the censure of the higher authorities, and even taking on himself the blame for acts that had been done against his orders; and as a consequence he was served loyally, and worshipped by his men.

Boxwell, Smith, Grant, and many another good

man, have long since gone to their rest—Boxwell and Smith in India, and Grant, oddly enough, for he was the only one of the three born in India and with Indian blood in his veins, somewhere in England.

In Mr. Boxwell's successor, Mr. Oldham, the District got the right master; for a storm was brewing, and a stern, strong man was wanted to deal with it. The approaching Census of 1881 was going to give trouble. Whether, as some said, the Sonthals were made a tool of by agitators, or whether, as others said, they acted of their own accord, there is little doubt that the Census was the occasion rather than the cause of their excitement, and that the real cause was the money-lenders.

Sir Ashley Eden, now the Lieutenant-Governor, knew those he had to deal with. Troops were in readiness, and the regiment which had been sent away from Doomka some years before was brought back, none too soon. Mr. Barlow, the Commissioner, had the experience of many years to guide him. Mr. Oldham was not a man to neglect precautions. If any one misjudged the situation it was one of the old "Hakims," Mr. Cosserat, now Forest Officer in the South Damin, who declared that he could go anywhere and no Sonthal would lift a finger against him. Like many military officers in the Mutiny, he overrated his popularity.

The Census came, and with it here and there

outbreaks of violence. The subdivisional residence at Jamtara, a thatched bungalow, was set on fire by a mob and burnt to the ground, the Subdivisional Officer being glad to escape with his life. Mr. Cosserat was captured in his own house, insulted by his own people, and forced by them to sign an order *in red ink*—they were particular about that—cancelling the Census.

Mr. Smith, in a bungalow on the Bhaugulpore road, sixteen miles from Doomka, had to sit all that night amid his weak little escort of constables, facing a wild mob of Sonthals, who were trying, with shouts and much gesticulation, to work themselves up for a charge. He himself has told me how he sat with his loaded rifle on his knees, every now and then loosening the cartridges to make sure that they did not jam; wondering if the Sonthals would make up their minds to charge before help came; wondering if his message asking for help had reached Doomka.

His message had reached Doomka. Mr. Oldham was not there, and the officer in command of the troops, at first indisposed to do anything, was at last persuaded by Mr. Manson, the "Hakim" in charge, to send a party of soldiers. They arrived in time. The Sonthals had not yet made up their minds for a charge, which even if it succeeded meant death to those in the van. Smith heaved a sigh of relief as he saw the bayonets glinting in the early morning light on the Doomka road. "It was his turn now. Of that furious mob some were

arrested, and the others fled. The disturbance in this quarter, at least, was quelled.

One more scene—a short one. The Deputy Commissioner's tent under a tree. His wife and children are inside, alone; for he is out somewhere on business. Suddenly appears before it a mob of howling Sonthals—an alarming sight to any one whom they threaten; and they threaten the inmates of the tent. The lady appears at the door of the tent, and holds up a warning hand.

“Hush!” she whispers. “You'll waken the baby!”

The Sonthals slink off abashed, lost in amazement at the courage of this lady, unconcerned for her own peril—anxious only lest her baby's rest should be broken.

What might have happened had not precautions been taken no one can tell. As it was, troops, including cavalry, of whom the Sonthals had a special dread, were poured into the country, and marched up and down, backwards and forwards, through and through, until the people were thoroughly cowed.

The usual conference followed, and it was decided to add to the Government Police force in the District. The Regular Police were to be introduced into the parts of Godda, Rajmahal, and Pakour that lay outside the Damin, the right of the village head-man as a Police Magistrate to send up his cases direct to the “Hakim” being again saved.

In Doomka and Jamtara there were to be

bodies of what was called "Intelligence Police," not for the investigation of cases, but for finding things out. It was thought our "Hakims" had been too much taken by surprise, and ought to have known what was coming had they been in proper touch with the people.

A company, 100 strong, of the new Military Police was also provided, with its headquarters at Doomka, and outposts in the two principal storm-centres of the Damini—Katikund in the south, the scene of the outrage on Mr. Cosserat, and Borio in the north.

It must strike the reader with what patience the Sonthals were being treated—and indeed in the eyes of many they were a much indulged people. The view seems always to have been taken that when they broke loose, it was not from vice, but because of ill-treatment. Even this Census disturbance only made the authorities keener to find a remedy for the distressing epidemic of alienation of land which seemed to have seized upon them. It was perhaps a good thing for them that they had so many friends in high quarters. Not to mention Sir George Campbell and Sir Richard Temple, both strong non-Regulation men, there were Sir Ashley Eden and Sir Rivers Thompson, the two first chiefs of the Sonthal Pergunnahs, as Lieutenant-Governors in succession. One of the remarkable qualities of this people was the wonderful way in which it won the affection of those Europeans who came in personal contact with it.



Mr. Oldham's remaining time was spent in attempting to solve the vexed question of alienation, and in arranging for a revenue settlement of the Highlands, to which he very nearly brought the Highlanders to consent. He left, and was succeeded by Mr. Forbes.

Mr. Forbes' stay was a short one. He took up the alienation question vigorously, holding that all alienations of their land by Sonthals were illegal, and cancelling the contracts right and left, even on the application of the men who made them, restoring the land to the old occupiers. There was a rush all over the District to institute suits. Cattle, ornaments, household goods were sold to buy Court fee stamps, and thousands of complaints were filed. All went merrily for a season, but a check soon came; for the Government saw, disapproved, and set aside some of the orders founded on the new doctrine.

It was at this stage that Mr. Forbes' health gave way, and I was sent to take his place. It will be seen how strange must have appeared everything---the system, the country, the people, the work to one with my previous experience.

At the time when I first went out to India, Boxwell had just gone to the Sonthal Pergunnahs and the settlement was beginning. I went to Serampore about the time Oldham went to Doomka. In 1879 I actually paid a visit to Soorie, the capital of Beerbhoom, and looked north at the Doomka Hills. At the time when I went to Midnapore Forbes was taking over charge.

Yet all the time I was busy with other matters, so far as I can remember, not a whisper of the exciting events—they were, it will be owned, exciting—going on in the Sonthal Pergunnahs ever reached me. They were not discussed in any newspapers that I saw, or talked of in any conversation I had a part in.

## VI

### THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

I WILL try now to give an idea of my new world and of its inhabitants as I found it in 1886.

In area it was a little less than Yorkshire. The mile-to-the-inch map of it occupied six large sheets, was filled with names, and yet did not contain the names of nearly all the villages. The first and obvious fact was that the District had been formed because of the Sonthals. The second, not at first so obvious, was that the Sonthals were not the only people—not even a majority, and were not the old inhabitants, but newcomers.

The District was built up around the Damin-i-koh (a long narrow tract about the size and shape of the county of Sussex set on end), which owed its being to the Highlanders. This tract consisted of the Rajmahal range of hills, with the interior villages and glens, and a strip of flat land encircling their outer base (the skirts of the Hills—Damin-i-koh—whence it took its name). In old times the Khetowrie barons, who held the low land on its west—Hendwai, Belbathan, Passai, Barkope, Patsanda, and Manihari—were established with

their clansmen to hem in the Highlanders. No one had heard of the Sonthals.

The District of Deoghur, again, in the old times had been a Bhunya country, settled on a military tenure to give security to the western frontier of Bengal, of which, before the advent of the British, Nagore was one of the outposts.

Here also there were no Sonthals. Then the Sonthals came flowing like a tide in among the other races, filling up the unoccupied valleys, painfully clearing jungle, damming streams, facing wild beasts and disease in order to make themselves homes. But still it hardly seems clear—does it?—why the Sonthals, who were made welcome as pioneers, should not have got on well enough in this new land. They were law-abiding, not quarrelsome, good payers of rent, desirable tenants. Why should the Khetowries, the Bhunyas, and others among whom they settled bear them ill-will and persecute them?

It was not the old residents who were the worst enemies of the Sonthals, but the parasites—Hindoos from Bengal on the south and Behar and Upper India on the north, who came in and fastened on them, and would not let them be.

The aim of these parasites was twofold—to exploit them, keeping them as drudges who should gather the fruit of the land that they might enjoy it, or to displace them, inducing the Sonthal pioneers to go away from the homes they had

made with so much pains, and leave their fields empty for others to occupy.

It was an old and familiar process, one of the factors in the swiftness with which this strange people had spread. But for one circumstance it might have gone on even here without interruption, for the Sonthal hates bother, and if worried enough where he is, readily moves on to some place which he can have to himself.

The new circumstance was that their onward movement had brought them to the end of the forest-land up against the Ganges river, and there was no possibility of moving farther. They multiplied, but could no longer migrate. Their parasites teased and worried them. It was in vain that they gave up all that was possible to give up to save bother.

"Why did you give this man your land?" I once asked a Sonthal.

"Oh, he bothered me, and bothered me day after day," was the reply; "so at last, to have done with it I gave him the land."

But the landlords? Why did they not keep their Sonthal tenants? The foremost reason, doubtless, was that the Sonthal, though unrivalled as a pioneer, is a very indifferent cultivator, and the Bengali or the Behar Hindoo, though he would never have made the fields, could get more out of them. And if the Sonthal stayed on as a drudge his Hindoo master could make him work harder as a drudge than he would ever have done as a free

man. So the landlords were not greatly interested in standing between the "Dikkoo" parasites and their Sonthal victims.

The process would not strike the "Hakims" at first sight as anything out of the way. The migratory habits of the Sonthals were assumed to be natural to him. When he left his land to be occupied by a "Dikkoo" successor, even Mr. Boxwell thought at first that he went because he liked it. To many it was a new idea that a Sonthal should love his home, and feel bitterly having to leave it. But when the Ganges intervened the truth began to appear. This, then, was the great problem, how to keep the Sonthal victims out of the clutches of their "Dikkoo" parasites, so that they should neither be driven away nor exploited, but remain free and contented on the land they had reclaimed from waste. But this was only part of the work; for the whole people—not only the half-million of Sonthals, but the million of inhabitants belonging to other races, must be governed.

Some idea has already been given as to who these were, but I may venture here to take a rapid glance around the District and pass them in review.

The Sonthal Pergunnahs may be broadly divided into two parts—the part that surrounds and includes the Damin, and the old District of Deoghur, which does not touch the Damin. The former is composed of the hills which extend from the Ganges

in the north to the Beerbhoom border on the south, and of the flat land around them—whose waters find their way north and east, around or through those hills, to the Ganges. The Deoghur District, continuing the upward slope from the Ganges valley towards the Hazaribagh plateau in the west, is a long succession of gentle undulations, with here and there a detached hill, draining off to the south. All the internal rivers are mere watercourses, which are full in flood time, and at other times run nearly dry. They are of no use for navigation.

From the time of the rebellion the Damini ceased to be a unit. It has been divided, for administrative purposes, into four parts, each belonging to a separate subdivision of the District.

The headquarters subdivision is Doomka, about the size of Suffolk—a land of forest and mountain ranges. It occupies the centre and south of the District, and is a sort of link between Bengal and Behar. The Bengali and the Hindi languages are both spoken here. It is a frequent experience to find Bengali being talked in one village and Hindi in the next. The two leading proprietors outside the Damini were the Khetowri Rajah of Hendwai, a well-mannered sot, and the Bengali Rajah of Hetampore, who, though his home was over the border in Beerbhoom, was practically a resident. He was a keen landlord of the new school. Both of these had as boys been wards of Government, but only the latter had profited by his training.

There were other large proprietors, nearly all non-resident, and one ward of Government, the proprietress of Sankara. Both within and without the Damin, the Doomka subdivision was the most purely Sonthal part of the District. It was at Katikund, in the Doomka Damin, that the outrage on Mr. Cosserat took place. In the south, towards the Beerbhoom border, there were some genuine Bengali villages, cleared and settled by Bengalis.

A line up the central ridge from the Doomka border to near the river Ganges divides the Damin into two long strips—a narrow one on the west, which belongs to Godda, and a broader one on the east, the south end of which belongs to Pakour, and the north to Rajmahal. It will be convenient to describe the Damin of these three subdivisions as a whole. It is occupied by two races, the Highlanders under their head-men and chiefs, on the tops of the hills, and the Sonthals under theirs, in the valleys.

There is forest in the southern part of this tract, but the north end has been stripped of its forest, and the hills are bare. Having no forest, and being pressed up from the lower slopes even of their hills by the growth of the Sonthal population below, the northern Highlanders were very poor and wretched, and were reputed thieves. They were of a different race from the southern Highlanders—gypsy-like and small, with a language of their own. The southern Highlanders being



subject to less pressure, and having a good deal of forest land left, were a more prosperous people. They were of a different race, being bigger and stronger, and talking a kind of Bengali. It was these people who had in the old days manned the armies of the Rajah of Sultanabad.

The Sonthals in all the three subdivisions were of much the same type—those of Rajmahal being perhaps of a more surly nature than the others. It was among them that the great rebellion first broke out, and their chief market—Borio—was one of the two “storm-centres,” the other being Katikund.

Here and there, scattered over the Damin, were the bazaars, where the traders had their shops and markets were held. The principal were Katikund in Doomka, Chandna and Simra in Godda, Amrapara and Hiranpore in Pakour, and Barhait and Borio in Rajmahal.

Taking the three subdivisions one by one, we come first to Godda, on the west. In size it was about equal to Dorsetshire: it was pure Behar—one-third Damin and the remaining two-thirds composed of the rest of those Khetowrie baronies among which Hendwai, in Doomka, already mentioned, was the farthest south.

Parasites had been active in this region, where, in consequence, the Sonthals were much reduced both in numbers and in prosperity. One was apt, looking from Doomka, to regard this region as very out of the way—whereas, looked at from

Bhaugulpore, its parent District, it was really the easiest part of the Sonthal Pergunnahs to reach, and beaten upon by the pressure of the dense Behari population on the banks of the Ganges. The proprietors of the Khetowrie estates were a good deal like him of Hendwai—not so sottish, about as careless and improvident, and equally deep in debt.

The river Ganges, passing eastwards along the north face of the hills first in the Godda, then in the Rajmahal part of the Damin, turns round them to the south, enclosing in the angle the subdivision of Rajmahal, which faces it on two sides, the north and the east.

Rajmahal, about the same size as Leicestershire, is two-thirds Damin and one-third outside. Its portion of the Damin is by far the largest of the four.

The flat land between the Damin and the river Ganges is, as has been said, full of historic landmarks—the fort of Teliagurhi, the ruins of Rajmahal, once the capital of Bengal; the great Mogul road, with its bridges; the battle-field of Oodwa Nulla.

And it was still the busy corner of the Sonthal Pergunnahs. The loop line of rail connected it by land with Calcutta and Patna, while the great waterway of the Ganges brought to its ports of Sahibgunj and Rajmahal fleets of country boats and some steamers. Sahibgunj, facing north, was the crossing-place for Purnea, with its new rail-

way, now approaching completion ; and Rajmahal, facing east, for Malda. Sahibgunj, an important railway centre, was an entrepôt for goods going to and coming from the west—a place of merchants ; and there was also considerable trade done in the export of local products—Sabai grass (like esparto) for the paper-mills, stone for roads and other purposes, and indigo.

The population of this outside belt was mixed as far as Rajmahal. Indeed the hills are here so close to the river that little room is left between for inhabitants. On the broader belt at the south end the agriculturists were mainly Mahomedans of the Firazi sect, who occupied both banks of the Ganges in the four converging Districts of the Sonthal Pergunnahs, Malda, Moorshedabad and Beerbhoom. The Firazis are reputed gloomy and fanatical. Some of them were mixed up with the Wahabi troubles of twelve years before, when Lord Mayo and Mr. Justice Norman were murdered, and they were believed at this time to be subscribing, after their manner—a handful of rice laid aside at each meal—for the camp in the Black Mountains on the Afghan frontier, which was maintained by a band of Mahomedan irreconcilables, for the purpose of making perpetual war on the British “Raj.”

Pakour, which adjoins Rajmahal on the south, having Doomka to its south-west, completes this part of the District. About the size of the county of Surrey, it was half within and half without the

Damin. The part outside was owned by the two Rajahs of Ambar and Sultanabad, already mentioned. The Sultanabad end, all west of the railway, was peopled almost entirely by Sonthals; and so was the part of Ambar west of the line. Both these areas had some remnants of forest, which was being rapidly cleared. In both the parasites were busy.

Pakour had also a part east of the line belonging to Ambar, and populated by Firazis like those of Rajmahal.

On a clear evening in the rainy season, when there is no dust, looking from Doomka, one can see in the west, peeping over the nearer hills, the crests of Fuljhor, the highest hill in the District (2300 feet), and Teor.

These two hills are on the eastern side of the Deoghur subdivision, thirty miles from Doomka. Deoghur, and Jamtara to the south, together form the old District of Deoghur which was taken for the Sonthal Pergunnahs from Beerbhoom. The river draining them both is the Adjye, which enters by the west of Deoghur and passes out by the south of Jamtara.

The District of Deoghur was divided into two when Sir George Campbell consolidated the Sonthal Pergunnahs into one District. For some years before there had been an outpost at Jamtara on the new chord line. When Deoghur became a subdivision, the south end of it, about the size of

the county of Surrey, was attached to Doomka, with Jamtara as its headquarters. One is apt to forget that in the old Beerbhoom days, when as yet Deoghur belonged to Beerbhoom, what we now call Jamtara was the part nearest headquarters. We are accustomed to regard Deoghur as much nearer the centre of things. It is more fully cleared, and, partly because it was long the District headquarters, and partly because of the temple and the Calcutta colony, has a name for enlightenment.

The road from Beerbhoom to Deoghur passed along the watershed between the basins of the Adjye and the More. Astride of it stood,—still stands—the only remaining relic of a great city—the earthen wall of Nagore, ten miles long and twelve feet high, built to withstand raids made by the wild tribes of the forest, or perhaps by one of the neighbouring Rajahs—Hendwai and Gidhour.

It was a land of the Ghatwals from Nagore to Deoghur. When the Rajah of Hetampore made up his mind to absorb the Ghatwals, he naturally began with the nearest; and thus it happened that in the year 1815, when the law was passed which saved the remainder of the Ghatwals, hardly one of those in the area afterwards known as Jamtara survived. Most of them had compromised with their powerful adversary, and by sacrificing the greater part of their land had been permitted with the title of “Sirdar” to hold a small remnant.

The only Ghatwal left in Jamtara was he of Narainpore. The last male of the line was killed by the Sonthals in the great rebellion, and his widows, thirty - one years afterwards, were still wards of Government. The Sonthals of Jamtara were numerous, but sadly corrupted and embittered by contact with Bengali parasites, who pressed them very sore.

Besides Hetampore, the only other resident proprietor of importance was the Rajah (by courtesy) of Jamtara, a cripple, who, when he went out of doors was carried on a man's back.

The northern part of the Deoghur District, now the Deoghur subdivision, was about the size of Leicestershire. Here the Ghatwals had been preserved untouched, though one—he of Koiridi—had been dismissed for disloyal conduct during the great Mutiny, and his tenure given to Mr. Grant, the same who saved Sankara in Doomka. When the cavalry regiment at Rohini (close to Deoghur) mutinied and murdered their officers (the officers' graves are in the Subdivisional Officer's garden at Deoghur), Mr. Grant, who was there, saved his life by hiding in the brushwood on the bank of a neighbouring stream. A poor man took him into his house, gave him shelter, and, though miserably poor, fed him till better times.

The Ghatwals' tenants were their clansmen. The Sonthals in this subdivision were few, and the parasites were from Behar, not Bengal.

Two of the Ghatwals, Rohini and Punassi, were represented by females—in the former the daughter, in the latter the widows of the last male proprietors, who were wards of Government.

Deoghur, where the headquarters were, is a small town, famous because of the great temple of Baidyanath—the god of healing—whither pilgrims resort from all parts of India.

There is here a great community of priests, or “pandas,” who reckon their pilgrim clients as other men reckon sheep and cattle. Each keeps in his book a list of all the pilgrims who have visited the shrine and have employed him. So strong is his belief that he has a vested right to be employed by these persons again when they repeat their visit, that on the death of a panda his pilgrims are divided among his heirs, like his other property.

The pandas were from up country, not from Bengal—great burly men and famous wrestlers—of the same blood as the soldiers who became known to fame as “pandies.”

The High Priest and the pandas were always in dispute over the offerings of pilgrims ; and the High Priest, as manager of the temple, had a way of neglecting to pay his debts. Thus, though Government does not interfere in matters religious, they kept our Courts busy and our Magistrates on the alert, for a temple riot was a very serious thing. Besides ordinary pilgrims, many sick persons resorted to the shrine of the “god of healing.”

Lepers abounded. At every turn beggars sat with their bowls by the wayside, showing their sores and crying for alms.

The lepers were not agreeable neighbours. My friend Mr. Smith once found one who had got into his dog-cart, and had gone to sleep there.

Owing to the risk of cholera, cleanliness had to be forced on the town and the pandas, whose ideas of sanitation were old-fashioned.

For this we had allies in the colony of Bengali gentlemen from Calcutta, who had built houses here to which they came for a change, and brought with them ideas both on politics and on sanitation in sharp contrast to those of the local pandas and Ghatwals.

At Madhupore, the highest point on the main line of the East India Railway (800 feet above the sea), was a community of Europeans—railway-men, pensioners, and convalescents,—for the Calcutta doctors sent their fever patients here to recruit their strength.

Near this place too was the only coal-mine in the District.

There is not about Deoghur the same Sonthal flavour that there is about the rest of the District. I have an idea that it may have been taken from Beerbhoom and given to the Sonthal Pergunnahs, less on its own account than on account of Jamtara. Jamtara had to go, and what was to be done with Deoghur, cut off by it from Beerbhoom? If part went, all had to go.



Still, the system we had seemed to satisfy the inhabitants; and any attempts made to get Deoghur transferred to Monghyr, a Regulation District, met, so far as I could see, with no local sympathy.

## VII

### THE WORK

HERE, as at Serampore, I found work to do and a problem to solve ; but the doing of the work left little time for the solving of the problem.

As Deputy Commissioner I was the “neck of the bottle” ; everything had to pass through me.

*Staff.*—The working staff, of which I was the head, consisted of a score of superior officers ; a hundred clerks, sub-inspectors and the like ; about 200 messengers, or orderlies, and process-servers. Some hundreds of Government police, military and civil ; 3000 village watchmen, 500 stipendiary chiefs of the Highlanders ; all the Ghatwals and Sirdars ; and, under the settlement, some 8000 village head-men.

The management of so large a staff gave much work. When a man died, or was dismissed or suspended, or was transferred, or took leave, his place had to be filled. Good conduct had to be encouraged by rewards, and bad conduct punished. Punishment had to be carefully considered ; promotion not less so ; for anything savouring of injustice rankled and made bad blood. Small

though such a thing might appear to us, it was not small to those concerned.

Especial care had to be taken with the 8000 village head-men. Each of them was the custodian of his village, and we "Hakims" were the custodians of these custodians, punishing where punishment was needed, and filling up vacancies in consultation with the villagers. So overwhelming was the importance of getting the right man, that we sometimes took years over an election.

*Office.*—It was no small task to look after my own office. Opening and initialing letters alone took up half an hour or more of my time daily. I had very often to write—always to pass—drafts of letters going out, and to read and sign the fair copies before issue. I had to see that letters were duly docketed and put with their bundles, entered in the letter book, and promptly attended to. There were clerks for all this, but they always needed watching.

There were the buildings, the furniture, the instruments, record room, stationery, postage stamps, library, correspondence registers, service books of the staff—scores of seeming trifles, apparently of no importance when all was right, but any one of which might become of vital importance if something went wrong.

I had to watch not only my own office, but those of other officers at Headquarters, at the five subdivisions, and elsewhere in the District.

With correspondence especially there was a perpetual struggle to keep it within bounds, and to get people to answer letters. Verbosity and procrastination were prevalent faults in every office.

*Police.*—As head of the Police I had to see the daily reports of crime and other happenings from all parts of the District; to watch the progress of inquiries, calling when needful for reports, making suggestions and passing orders; dispose of lost property and see that the proceeds were duly credited; and to see to the registration of vital statistics. In connection with this branch of the work, every Police station, with its buildings, registers, etc., had to be inspected at least once a year by me personally.

*Magistrates.*—As head of the Magistrates I had to supervise the proceedings of my fifteen subordinate “Hakims,” and of the various Benches, seeing that cases were promptly disposed of and witnesses were not unduly detained (for some Courts were given to dawdling). In criminal cases tried by subordinate Magistrates I had to hear appeals. The heavier cases, which they could not try, I had myself to try up to the limit of my powers—seven years’ imprisonment. The heaviest cases went to the Court of Session.

*Jails.*—The jails and lock-ups were also under me. I had to keep an eye on the buildings, the wells, the food, sanitation, and health of the prisoners; to see that none were detained without

a proper warrant ; that the discipline was good and not too harsh ; that the work was appropriate and useful, not too profitable, and at the same time paying its way. The security of the buildings had to be carefully examined, since the occurrence of an escape was discreditable.

In the Sonthal Pergunnahs this department gave great trouble, for hardly one of the buildings was suitable. Most of them were disgraceful, insanitary, overcrowded styes, which no care could make healthy or even decent.

This branch provided another batch of inspections to be done twice a year.

*Bad Characters.*—I had also to watch the Police lists of suspected bad characters, weeding out names which ought to be removed. To be under Police surveillance was a degrading position.

*Judicial.*—As District Judge I had to supervise the work of my fifteen “Hakims,” all of whom had powers of Civil Courts—the six Subdivisional Officers being of a higher grade, and the other nine of a lower. I had to hear appeals and applications for revision ; myself to try cases of probate and claims to intestate property, to watch the course of litigation, and examine its courses, with a view to action, if necessary.

*Revenue.*—As collector of revenue I had to consider cases of applications for mutation of names in the register of revenue paying estates, and of certificates issued for the recovery of public demands.

*Court Work.*—In the more important cases—criminal, civil, and revenue—I heard lawyers; in the smaller, I was legal adviser to both sides. I had no clerk to record evidence. I was my own clerk, and have sometimes sat from eleven in the morning to as late as ten at night with the pen driving at full speed, translating into English as I went evidence given now in Hindi, now in Bengali or Sonthali. Very often the record had to be taken home, and the judgment written after a laborious consideration. For in Civil suits especially my judgments were accepted by the subordinate Courts as “leading cases,” and a carelessly-worded passage might have a disastrous effect.

The Commissioner was for all but a few heavy Civil suits our High Court, and appeals against my orders went to him. When a record was called for in appeal, I had to go through the petition of appeal, and answer its allegations one by one. Every one knows how hard it is to answer arguments by anticipation. That is what we had to do, since we seldom had a chance of face-to-face discussion. Many a judgment have I seen upset for reasons that could easily have been answered if they had been thought worth answering.

In writing our judgments, we had to act on the principle followed by my servant when we were going into camp.

“Why,” my wife asked of him, “do you take so many things?”

“Because,” he answered, “if I leave anything behind, that is just the thing my master will call for.”

The most unsatisfactory part of our judicial staff were the process-servers. In every case summonses, warrants, and notices had to be served on parties and witnesses, sometimes twenty or thirty miles from the Court. Our process-servers received the pay of unskilled labourers, and yet had much in their power. In Civil suits especially, where decrees *ex parte* were allowed to be given, it was a simple thing to report that a notice not served had been served; and then the first time the defendant heard of the suit was when a Court bailiff came to attach his property in execution of the decree. Again, property might be seized, and a false list submitted to the Court, or a mock sale held, and the goods sold at inadequate prices.

Frauds such as these were easy to commit, and it was also easy to allege falsely that they had been committed. It was, however, the most difficult thing in the world to determine on which side lay the truth. To lean one way was to paralyse justice; to lean the other meant a free hand to oppression and blackmail. There were thousands of cases every year, in almost all of which the conduct of the process-servers was called in question. The worst of it was that we could devise no check sufficient to ensure their probity, and yet could not place confidence in them.

Thus in our administration of justice we had travelled very far from the scrap of paper scribbled

under a tree and given to a party—Yule's original system; and even from the stern simplicity enjoined by Sir George Campbell. Whether we had got nearer to doing substantial justice is doubtful; but there was no doubt as to the weight of the load we had now to carry.

I had, moreover, heavy inspections to make, and long reports to write, over and above doing the work itself.

*Treasury.*—The business affairs of the Government were many and various, and all under my charge. We were our own bankers. In the Treasury we kept our own stock of cash. Into it were paid all the funds due to the Government for revenue, rent, public demands, Court receipts, etc.; and from it were paid all the funds due by Government for salaries and other expenses. The surplus, when there was one, was sent away elsewhere; deficits were made up by remittances from other Treasuries. Money was in the shape of notes and metal coin. We had a strong room where the main balance was kept. Here also we kept a stock of stamps for postage, telegraph, Court fees, the writing of valuable instruments, the making of copies, etc.; and of opium and “ganja” (hemp drug) for sale. For our stock of money, stamps, and drugs, I was held personally responsible. Any loss due to my neglect of the rules I was liable to make good from my own pocket. The rules were minute, elaborate, and exacting; yet, as experience proved, not one whit too much so if they were to



be a guard against fraud. Any slackening of vigilance generally ended in disaster.

We had five Branch Treasuries at the subdivisions; and I had to make an inspection of all the six twice a year, counting the cash and the stamps, and examining the numerous books and registers. The counting of the stamps alone was half a day's work.

*Revenue Collection.*—The collection of the land revenue was another duty demanding the utmost method and regularity; for a proprietor whose revenue was not duly credited to the day forfeited his estate. Office frauds were more than once detected. Elaborate registers had to be kept; lists of defaults made up and examined, and sales of defaulting estates held.

*Government and Wards' Estates.*—The management of our Government and wards' estates was a big business. The area of the Damin alone was 830,000 acres, and we had, I think, 60,000 agricultural tenants, besides the "basowri" or non-agricultural tenants. The Highlanders paid no rent, but they provided work in the payment of stipends to their 500 stipendiary chiefs, who owned attendance at Headquarters, and whose fines for irregularity were deducted on pay day. We had not a single rent-collector for the Damin. The rent of its 1200 villages was brought in for each village by its own "Manjhi," and lodged in the Treasury at the annual collection. The collections of the four wards' estates were considerable. The progress of

the collections had to be closely watched, first because ours, unlike that of the Serampore landlord, was a real and not a nominal demand : it was meant to be collected, and irrecoverable arrears were struck off ; and again, because any hanging back of the Damin Manjhies with their rent was one of the first signs of trouble.

Each estate—the Damin and the four wards' estates—had its budget for salaries, improvements, etc., and its subsidiary receipts. The management of a great estate, in short, demands much time and attention, even if one has assistants to attend to the details. For the “Damin” I had no assistants but the four “Hakims” and the Forest Officer.

*Excise.*—Another important business was that of excise. We had distilleries for the manufacture of spirits ; shops for the brewing and sale of beer ; and shops for the sale of spirits, wine, opium, and ganja, all under Government licence. We were expected to prevent or detect illicit manufacture, import or sale of exciseable articles ; to open or shut shops where it was necessary ; to make as much revenue as we could without encouraging consumption—all with a minimum of inquisition. The shops were let annually by auction. All this involved much thought and worry, and a good deal of downright hard work.

*Land Acquisition.*—When land had to be acquired for public purposes, as for a railway, a road, a school, hospital, office, or other public building, that was my duty as collector.

*Records.*—I had charge of the record rooms, to which were sent all the records of the District not in current use—of the courts, revenue departments, and other public offices. These had all to be carefully arranged, registered, indexed, and put in their places, so that any paper that was wanted might be found at once; preserved from destruction by insects, and from being stolen or tampered with. If any one wanted a copy, it had to be made by the staff of copyists; and we had to see that it was made correctly and issued promptly. The copying clerks were apt, if not watched, to keep back copies unless a private expedition fee were paid.

The record room was a rich field for fraud, since here were often the proofs of valuable titles. The stamps on documents were sometimes stolen. It was an important business merely to see that all the courts' fee stamps were duly defaced. There was a constant stream of records coming in; and room had to be made by the destruction of records no longer needing to be kept. Some were kept for ever; some for one term of years, and some for another; and each paper, as its time came, was sorted out and went into the fire. The lists all came to me before being passed for destruction.

*Pounds.*—All the pounds in the District were farmed out each year, and I had to watch the settlements, and see that the rents were duly paid; to inspect the enclosures, and to satisfy myself that the impounded animals were duly fed and cared

for, that those unclaimed were disposed of by public auction at reasonable prices, and that no undue charges were exacted from the owners.

*Registration.*—As District Registrar I had in my own office, and in the various registration offices of the District, to receive, copy, and return properly endorsed all documents presented for registration; to see that they were properly and correctly copied and indexed, and that the work was done and the documents were returned promptly; that the correct fees were taken and that they were duly credited; that the buildings were in a fit condition and secure; and that the work was carried on properly. I had to inspect my own and all the other offices twice a year.

*Health.*—Then there were the medical departments of vaccination, sanitation, hospitals, and dispensaries. Our two municipalities of Deoghur and Sahibgunj had to be watched and kept up to the mark; and we had in Doomka itself and other of the larger town-villages quasi-municipal machinery for doing the same work. Vaccination was a standing trouble, the more so that there was a tendency for all the appointments to get into the hands of a Calcutta ring—for vaccinators to push their trade too hard and blackmail the people cruelly. The work was not always well done, the lymph not always pure, and the practice of arm-to-arm vaccination sometimes spread disease. Yet so real a danger was smallpox that we had to encourage the people as far as possible to accept

vaccination as the best remedy, and much safer than inoculation, the old remedy.

Hospitals and dispensaries we had to subscribe to and inspect. We had to see that the medicines were used for the poor, whom they were meant for, and not given away to the rich, who could pay for their own; and that the institutions were kept clean, with good medicines and instruments; that cases were properly attended to; and that subscriptions promised were duly paid. For it is a weakness of the Indian gentleman to imagine that when he has put himself down for a subscription, he has done his duty, and need not pay.

For sanitation we had no special funds or agency, but wherever there was bad drainage we had to try to improve it; whenever and wherever there was an outbreak of cholera or fever, or other sickness, we had to do what we could by distributing medicine, and by other means, to stop it.

Rewards for poisonous snakes were still being paid here. As many as ninety of these were sometimes brought in of a morning, and it was a business of some magnitude to dispose daily of this mass of dead flesh.

Cattle disease, and horse diseases like glanders, had to be checked when they broke out; and something had to be done to educate the people about water.

Running streams even were not safe, when they were diminished in volume, as ours were, during

the dry season ; and the practice of burying instead of burning the bodies of those who died of cholera added fearfully to the risks ; for people liked to bury in soft places where digging was easy, such as the sandy beds of rivers, or the soft soil at the sides of tanks. There was all over the District a terrible amount of neglected disease, which came to notice every time the Doctor went on tour. But in the absence of skilled treatment it ran its course practically unchecked. The Sonthal believed that illness was the work of witches, and that the only remedy was to find and torture the witch.

*Settlement.*—Wherever active settlement was not going on, the Deputy Commissioner, being *ex officio* in charge of the settlement, had to take notice of and check every breach of it that he heard of. By the time I came the original term of the settlement had expired in every part of the District. A new settlement was due. In many villages there had been confusion from the first—in many, alienations and other causes had made new confusions ; and everywhere men—especially cunning interlopers—were fighting tooth and nail to prepare evidence that should make good their footing against the time when the new settlement should come.

*Education.*—I was practically the education committee for the whole District. All the primary schools were in our charge. They numbered, I think, some seven hundred, of which some were taught in Bengali and some in Hindi. We had

besides an education fund earmarked for the Sonthals.

There was a Deputy Inspector (under the Inspector of Patna), with sub-inspectors and “inspecting pundits”—that is, teachers who also inspected, as pupil-teachers are pupils who also teach.

The teachers of these seven hundred schools got absurdly low wages, the mere distribution of which month by month was a heavy, difficult, and costly business. Many of the teachers were unfit for their work; many of the buildings were unsuitable. We suspected that many of the pupils on the roll never saw the inside of the school unless when assembled for inspection, and that even when they attended they were taught nothing. We knew that Sonthal children, who were never expected to pass examinations, for whom an allowance per head was paid, sat neglected on a bench in a corner. They were not taught, for the all-sufficient reason that they were “Sonthals.” It may be imagined that the task of making a reality of a sham in very trying circumstances took a good deal out of one.

*Roads.*—The roads were another of my charges. The District needed roads. Military roads were made after the rebellion of 1855, and again after the Census disturbance of 1881. Famine relief roads were made in 1874. Roads had since been made from time to time: many more were urgently needed. In particular they were needed

for the forests. The railway also, abetted by Government, was crying for feeders to its many stations. Our roads were few, wanting in bridges, badly graded, and in bad repair. Yet with the funds we had we could do little to improve them. We could barely keep the roads and bridges we had in some sort of order, after paying for establishment, maintaining rest-houses, and planting trees. The accounts, plans, estimates, contracts—the perpetual puzzling over the problem how to make one rupee do the work of five, took much time and trouble. I was always thinking what could be done to improve things; for roads were a hobby of mine.

*Forestry.*—Our forests were still in the stage of being nursed. We had no expert in forestry. I was in charge, with a “Hakim” for assistant. We had to adjust the rights of the villagers as to grazing and the cutting of wood for domestic purposes; to curb the propensity of Highlanders for destroying patches in order to cultivate; of Sonthals for running their cattle upon young growth, and of all for stealing our produce. Of course also we had to guard against fire, especially when the mohwa flower was falling, and people camped out under the trees, clearing away and burning the dead leaves, the better to see the fallen “manna.” In every village record village rights of wood and grazing were recorded. As guardian of the settlement I had to take an interest in the state of the fuel reserves and grazing-grounds of each of the



8000 villages which had records, and especially the mohwa trees. Bitter quarrels often broke out over such matters between landlords and tenants. Sometimes one was in the wrong; sometimes the other; sometimes both.

*Famine.*—After the experience of 1866, 1874, and 1878, we had been called on to elaborate plans for famine relief, fixing on appropriate relief works for every separate area, and keeping all in readiness for a start when and where it was needed. This was a District exposed to the risk of famine: no plans had as yet been prepared. We were constantly on the look-out for symptoms of famine, watching the weather, the state of the crops, prices of food grain, the movements of the people, reckoning up as well as we could the food resources for men and cattle. The bad time might never come; and it might come in any part of the District, any year, “like a thief in the night.” Then woe to us if we were not ready!

*Census.*—The time of the next Census was drawing near. Seeing what had happened in the last one, we were already giving much thought to, and beginning to discuss plans for the next.

The time had come for the revision of the settlement—a gigantic business, covering over three millions of acres. Considering the slapdash method of the first settlement, it was going to be a work of great difficulty, and the preliminary discussions were already occupying much of our thought.

*Missionaries.*—I have not yet mentioned the Christian missionaries, of whom there were some twenty of various denominations in the District. Many were excellent men: some peculiar. The adjustment of their relations with one another sometimes called for the exercise of tact. Though Government required its officers to stand neutral in religious matters, we had to know and keep on good terms with the missionaries, who could give us much help, and were, on the whole, a power for good.

*Accessibility.*—I had to make time to see and talk with any one, high or low, official or non-official, who came to see me. The Deputy Commissioner must, above all things, be easy of access.

*Social Duties.*—I did not live as a recluse. The duties of hospitality, which had both to be given and accepted, were pleasant, but encroached on my time. And I had my family with me.

*Reports.*—We had to send up many and voluminous reports and returns, both about our work and on any other subject concerning which curiosity was felt in high quarters. A report had to be full, complete in itself, and yet short and clear. As I was not a Lord Bacon, this involved the writing of many of my reports several times over, and the very reduction of their bulk added to my work.

*Conferences.*—I had always to be ready to attend conferences with officers, from the Lieutenant-Governor downwards. I welcomed them as saving

delay and correspondence, but they sometimes dislocated all my plans for the time.

*Correspondence.*—There was a constant stream of demi-official correspondence—letters that did not pass through the office, but took up time.

*Tours.*—I had to spend at least 120 days in the year on tour in the District. My work followed me, but there was less time for it.

*Climate.*—Nine months out of the twelve were the hot season, when the Governments flitted to the Hills. The climate of the plains during those nine months was not invigorating; but we had to work on through them.

*A Heavy Aggregate.*—In giving the above account which, though exhausting, is not exhaustive, I do not claim that my tale of work was heavier, taken all round, than those of other District Officers. I do submit, however, that it proves the truth of the remark with which this chapter began, that the doing of the work left little time for the solving of problems.

## VIII

### YULE'S SYSTEM

THE story of the Sonthal Pergunnahs up to 1886 may be broadly divided into four periods.

The first period, of fifty years—that of the Highlanders—ended in 1835 with the admission into the Damin of the Sonthals.

The second period, of twenty years—that of *laissez faire*—ended with the rebellion of 1855.

The third period, of seventeen years, was that of Yule's system—government by “Hakims” and “Manjhis,” which was being gradually crusted over with excrescences until Sir George Campbell partially restored it in 1872.

The fourth period, of fourteen years, witnessed the end of the Sonthal Commission—Yule's instrument—and the gradual weakening of Yule's system, which in 1886 seemed doomed to early extinction. Its last friend in the Government—Sir Rivers Thompson—was about to leave India. Mr. Barlow who, as Commissioner, had stood at the back of Boxwell and Oldham, supporting it during the whole of this period, had died and been succeeded by a stranger to it; and I, another

stranger, with no previous experience of the District or of non-Regulation, was the new Deputy Commissioner. What power was there left to keep it alive? There were still the Sonthals.

Every one of the changes which marked each period from the one before it was made under pressure from them.

In admitting them to the Damin, the Government yielded unwillingly to their persistence.

It was driven to adopt Yule's system by the apparent impossibility of ruling them by any other.

Sir George Campbell extorted the settlement law from a reluctant Government as an alternative only less disagreeable than that of shooting them down. The Sonthals remained, if their old friends were away.

I do not propose to weary the reader with details of my fourteen years in the Sonthal Pergunnahs. They began when Sir Rivers Thompson was Lieutenant-Governor; outlasted the reigns of his successors Sir Stuart Bayly, Sir Charles Elliot, and Sir Alexander Mackenzie, and ended in that of Sir John Woodburn.

There were, during that time, eleven different Commissioners of the Sonthal Pergunnahs, of whom only two, Mr. Oldham, a former Deputy Commissioner, and myself, had previous knowledge of the work and the system; and none of the others stayed long enough to become familiar with them. With the exception of one or two of the old hands—ex-assistant Commissioners converted into

Deputy Magistrates—no members of the old Commission remained. Our staff consisted of an occasional junior civilian, soon taken away, Deputy Magistrates, European and native, and sub-deputies, all natives, a new class—half Hakim, half clerk—all of whom were moved into the District and out of it again. Transfers were frequent—in Rajmahal scandalously frequent.

One evening I was strolling near the camp fire in the Rajmahal Damin with the Subdivisional Officer, who had been there only a few months, and a neighbouring Subdivisional Officer whom the Sonthals knew well. One of the villagers edged up to the visiting “Hakim,” and nodded with his head at his own “Hakim.”

“When does he go?” he asked.

“Go!” exclaimed Mr. S——. “He’s not going. Why, he has just come!”

“Oh yes, he is,” said the Sonthal. “They none of them stay more than a year, and his time is nearly up.”

The man was a true prophet. A few months later, when I paid my next visit to Rajmahal, the Hakim was gone. The subdivision was in temporary charge of a neighbouring Subdivisional Officer, and even the two assistants had been moved. Neither of their successors had been in the Sonthal Pergunnahs for three months. This was the sort of thing that every now and then happened, and was always impending, throughout the Sonthal Pergunnahs.

The system was still supposed to be in force, and we were supposed to be working it, but without Yule's instrument—a staff of “Hakims” known to, and knowing the people. Hardly any one outside of the Sonthal Pergunnahs believed that it was workable.

To cut this part of the story short, I determined, though conscious of the general feeling against the system among those who did not know it, to suspend judgment and do my best for it. As I gained knowledge of it I came to believe in it. I have never since lost faith in it. Faith, that is, in the principles; for the rules as they stood were impossible to work. It is evident that the rules when issued were meant to be the foundation, not the whole structure; for they ended with a promise of further rules.

But almost at once those who drew them up—Yule and Rivers Thompson—were taken away. Robinson, who revered Yule, probably deemed them too sacred to touch, and no one else thought them worth the trouble of altering.

The Company gave place to the Crown; the entire law of the land was remodelled and codified; the work of the Government was organised in departments, each with its own fat code of rules; the Sonthal Commission vanished; and still Yule's leaflet (all his rules went into the two sides of a sheet of paper) survived—the only thing in India unchanged during these thirty eventful years.

Unchanged, therefore unworkable. .

The rules required that for their work the Governments should contribute "Hakims," the people "Manjhis."

They applied especially to the investigation of crime, and provided that petty crime should be dealt with by the "Manjhi": serious crime by the "Hakim." Any delegation by the "Hakim" of his duties to minor officials, such as Darogahs, was insured against by abolishing them all. But in 1886, I found that the "Hakims" hardly ever investigated cases of serious crime. In the parts of the District where there were Government Police stations that duty was left to the Government Police—the successors of the Darogahs; and elsewhere to the Intelligence Police, who were not meant to be used in that way at all. The Government Police were a skeleton force; the Intelligence Police merely small scouting parties; and were provided with fewer officers, of lower grades, than corresponding forces in other Districts. The officers were supposed to be picked men. I used, indeed, to think that the men were picked—for their inefficiency. Thus Yule's plan of governing without Police had degenerated into a practice of governing with Police of a quality inferior to that of those employed in other Districts.

When I tried to carry out the rules by sending "Hakims" to investigate serious crime, I found that it could not be done. We had a mass of other work to get through, which we could only manage if each officer did his full daily task. Every time



an officer was sent out to investigate—a business often of days—his regular work came to a standstill, and we soon had a pile of arrears. Consequently, in the headquarters subdivision of Doomka, for instance, the whole investigating staff available for work in its 1600 square miles were a sergeant and two corporals of Intelligence Police, who found themselves allotted for this duty because of their general incapacity; for the department would not send us its good men to do work from which it got no credit.

Then again, the “Manjhis.” The principle of the rules was that the “Manjhi” represented the village. Instead of dealing with the individual villager, the “Hakim” was to deal with the headman—“Manjhi” or “Mondle.”

This was to be the beginning of an organisation of the people which would make possible direct contact between “Hakim” and people without the intervention of minor Government servants as go-betweens. All such go-betweens were abolished. Nobody was left, under the rules, except the “Hakim” and the “head-man.”

I am not sure what was Yule's exact idea of a village, or how many villages there were in his time. There had been no Census or settlement to give definiteness to either description or numbers, and in this region, of which the greater part had been recently reclaimed from jungle, a revenue “village” might mean anything up to a small county. Doubtless Yule had in his mind the group of houses

inhabited by one community, acknowledging its own chief.

The office of "Manjhi" was not invented by Yule. He found and made use of it. It was an institution which had existed in every village community of India from the most ancient times—in Regulation as well as non-Regulation Districts; among Hindoos and Mahomedans as well as Sonthals and Bhunyas.

The difference between the Hindoo "Mondle" and the Sonthal "Manjhi" was, however, at least in modern times, very great. In Serampore, where one of my projects had been to revive the village "Mondle," I found that as representative of his village that official had been crushed out of existence, and his place taken by a servant of the landlord—a man absolutely at the landlord's disposal, who might be, and frequently was, moved about from village to village to prevent him from striking root. Not only did he not represent the village, but his presence effectually prevented the rising up of any one else to represent it. This state of things seems to have become universal among the Hindoos. Thus, when Yule provides in his rules for the appointment of head-men to Hindoo villages, he directs that where there is a landlord's "Mondle" for the collection of rent, a separate Police "Mondle" shall be appointed for work under the rules.

The Sonthal "Manjhi," on the other hand, was a real hereditary chief. The Sonthals of the Son-

thal Pergunnahs were a race of foresters and pioneers. It was barely fifty years since the first of them had appeared in this part of Bengal. They were ever sending out hives and forming new settlements. Each separate colony was engaged in a struggle with nature—with the jungle, disease, floods, drought, and wild beasts. It was organised under a commander. The original commander who led it forth was the “Manjhi” of the village while he lived, and the office of “Manjhi” after him was filled by his descendants as long as there were any. He was the Magistrate of the village. Its people obeyed his orders; they accepted his acts. It was the attempt of the landlords, backed by the Law Courts, to capture the office of “Manjhi,” turning him, as the “Mondle” had elsewhere been turned, into a creature of the landlord, that was the main cause of the disturbances which led Sir George Campbell to propose the settlement law. In 1872 the settlement law was passed, and the first Census was carried out. By 1879 the whole District had been settled on the basis of the village—each village with its separate Record of Rights. In 1881 there was another Census, also on the basis of the village. In 1886, therefore, we knew the villages and the head-men.

I cannot recollect within thousands the number of the villages, but I take it at 8000 in all. I have seen various reasons given for the small average size of our villages. Some of the subordinate settlement officers are said to have

satisfied the demand of the higher authorities for an out-turn of an impossible number of villages in the year by splitting villages. Then it was desirable in a land of mixed races and languages to give each race group its own chief. Again, in a newly-settled country villages are small; and where there are ridges and valleys, the people are divided more than on flat, fertile plains.

All these facts help to account for the smallness of our villages. There were many without inhabitants; many others with but one or two resident families. Dealing with the head of such a village was, it is easy to see, not very different from dealing with its individual villagers; for the "Manjhi" then practically represented only himself. Probably from the time of issuing the rules—certainly from that of the settlement—the village head-man was reckoned as a public official, under the control of the Deputy Commissioner. As he was the only person from whom the landlord could claim the village rent (except in a few Bengali villages without head-men), and the only person who could claim it from the tenants, the name of the head-man for the time being had to be on record.

The Hill stipendiaries also, though not rent-payers, as receivers of stipends had to be registered. We had, therefore, a fairly complete list of head-men. But the difficulty of keeping a check on so great a multitude of isolated units was enormous. Each was master in his own village. If any of his

men committed an offence, he took charge of the offender; if any offence was committed in his village, he alone had jurisdiction—none of his neighbours could interfere.

I will quote, as an instance, a case that actually occurred.

A crime had been committed in Doomka subdivision. There being no "Hakim" available to inquire, an old Mahomedan corporal of Intelligence Police was sent out, and took up the inquiry with the help of the village "Manjhi." Under their treatment a man from or through whom they were trying to get proof, died. The "Manjhi" made a post-mortem examination impossible by burning the body. The "Manjhies" of the neighbouring villages looked on, unable to interfere, for it "wasn't their village." This case seems to be an epitome of the weak points of the system as it was then worked. There was no "Hakim." A low class of Police officer had taken his place; and the head-man was left unchecked in his village with despotic power, which he used in the way that was to be expected.

Whether those two committed the crime of torture or not is uncertain. I convicted them after a careful trial, which lasted five days, but they were let off on appeal. This and other cases, however, showed that, as understood in our day, the rules gave to the "Manjhi" an isolated and despotic position, which only the firm hand of the "Hakim" would make tolerable from the point of view either

of the Government or of the people ; and the firm hand of the "Hakim" was not there.

What passed for the Hakim's supervision, to take as an example the Doomka subdivision, was this. There being no Police stations, the 800 village watchmen gave attendance at Doomka before the Subdivisional Officer, some weekly, some fortnightly. This meant attendance of about ninety men every day. Their names were recorded in the attendance register, and each had to notify the births and deaths in his beat. The record was entered up by one of the Intelligence Police. The "Hakim"—the Subdivisional Officer—seldom saw or spoke to any of them, and so they went home again. The go-between of the "Manjhi" was seen by the go-between of the "Hakim"—but "Hakim" and "Manjhi" never met.

This, of course, was not Yule's plan. Yet it had been going on, probably from the beginning—from the time, at least, when other work drew away the "Hakim" from his business of keeping touch. When the opening of the chord line left Doomka and Godda short-handed ; when Doomka was made the headquarters of a full-blown District, with departmental work to do, and no proper staff to do it—when these events, the mass of judicial work for the settlement, and the death of the Sonthal Commission, with its traditions and *esprit de corps*, killed the very remembrance that the work required by Yule had ever been done by

or expected from the "Hakim." There were still "Hakims," but they were all busy: they had no time for this. And yet the system was an ideal one. Even in its embryo stage it was full of mighty possibilities.

I offered to stay for the rest of my service in the Sonthal Pergunnahs, and work at it, if given a free hand—but my offer was not accepted.

## IX

### THE DEPARTMENTAL MIND

I HAVE debated with myself whether to write this chapter or to leave it out. On the one hand, it may be objected to as giving a handle to the enemies of the Government of India, whose loyal servant and friend I was, and claim still to be ; on the other, it may be useful in opening the eyes of that Government to the strange things sometimes done in its name.

As the matters referred to have a bearing on my story, I have decided to speak and not keep silence. For twelve years after my offer had been made and refused I was kept on in the Sonthal Pergunnahs. During all that time I was trying to keep Yule's thought alive and to give it a body suited to its new environment. Yule's thought was to blend the will of the Government with the will of the people. The chief obstruction to his policy came, I found, not from the people, but from within the Government. The difficulty was not with the heads of the Government. Every one of the five Lieutenant-Governors under whom I served showed real sympathy with Yule's system ;



indeed I believe it owed its escape from entire destruction to their personal influence. But in a huge machine like the Government of Bengal in the days before Partition, the Lieutenant-Governor's power was much hampered by the great departments.

To an outsider like myself, the ideal of the departments appeared to be everybody everywhere doing the same thing at the same time in the same way. Each department had its field of work; and the ideal could only be realised if the whole province fell in with the arrangements made for it by the head of the department.

What I have ventured to call the "departmental mind" is a mind in which the quality, admirable in itself, of zeal for the department is so strong that it excludes sympathy, or even toleration, for anything that does not fit in with its ideal.

To such a mind any new proposal not originating with the department was likely to be wrong; local peculiarity was a thing to be got rid of; and a plan that could be worked in one place but not in others was inadmissible.

Yule's system was different from the accepted pattern for the province; it had been applied in only one of the forty-eight Districts of the province, and there only to conciliate a minority of the population—immigrants, reputed savages, who had recently made a nuisance of themselves by rebelling. The very system against which they had rebelled was extinct. Hardly a single depart-

mental officer knew the Sonthal Pergunnahs personally; and to the departmental mind the very existence of the Sonthal system was an offence, being a breach in the symmetry of the province. We had the "departmental mind" dead against us.

The merits and the services of the departments were great—their accumulated knowledge and experience far exceeded our small stock. Why did we in the Sonthal Pergunnahs not bow to their adverse verdict and give up backing Yule against their combined influence? The main reason, undoubtedly, was our faith in Yule's system. A man who had once been in actual contact with it could not but feel its life, its charm, and its spirit. We had the faith, and a missionary hope that the prejudice of the departments was due to their not knowing it, and that we might yet convert them. There was no reason why they should not take their place in it, if only they would not seek to destroy it. But over and above this, my opinion of their judgment on matters outside the limits of their own several fields was lowered by the many strange things they said and did. The mysterious working of the departmental mind seemed to take away their fairness, their humanity, and even their common-sense where the interest of the department was in question.

I am going now to quote a few out of the many incidents which led me to this conclusion. The first instance is one already quoted in Chapter XIII. of Book II.—my experiment in the collec-

tion of vital statistics made at Serampore. If the purpose of the department concerned had been to ruin my work, it could not have been better managed. A year's work was killed with a breath. I do not impute malice or stupidity—only sheer indifference.

The second instance is that already quoted in Chapter II. of this Book, of the high Police official who proposed to turn two or three hundred thousand people out of their homes and fields because they were in the way of his department. He was a kindly, good-hearted man, but his zeal for the department blinded him. Nothing else mattered to him.

Here is an instance of how the departmental mind sometimes worked in business. The great department of stationery used to send out hundreds of tons of paper to all the Districts of the province. A bright genius in the Calcutta office saw a chance of making a profit by selling the packing-cases. So a circular was issued directing an account to be kept of all packing-cases used, department by department. The packing cases were to be sold by auction, the proceeds brought to account and accounts submitted, separately for each department, periodically to the stationery office. This was done, and the proceeds thus obtained appeared as profits of the department. But the profits were fictitious. In my District elaborate accounts had to be kept at Headquarters and the five subdivisions; auctions were held in which, each lot

fetched about an ana (a penny); accounts were rendered to my office; compiled there, and submitted to Calcutta. It often happened that at some stage an error was found, and the account had to go back for correction. On the whole transaction the Government had spent in time, labour, stationery and postage, at least sixpence for every penny made. But what was that to the department? The expenses were not charged to it, and it got credit for the receipts.

The next instance shows how obstinately the "departmental mind" can shut its eyes to facts.

Our office work had become far too heavy for our limited staff of clerks. We would fain have reduced the office work, but were not allowed to. We had, accordingly, either to leave work undone or to overwork our clerks. We did both. A clerk can, as we all can, make a spurt on occasion. We were spurring all the time, and even then the work did not get done. Clerks broke down; some sickened; some died; and all the best men who could went elsewhere. Work done in such conditions is not good work: we lost credit. The whole thing was hateful—the overdriving, the bad work, and the constant arrears.

I represented the matter again and again, but to no purpose. Thinking once for all to break down the indifference of the higher powers, I took my strongest—that is worst—case: a subdivision with three clerks which had work for at least six or seven. I had had special occasion to notice this

subdivision, for its head clerk was the only one of the three who knew English, and two head clerks had died in close succession, leaving the office in confusion. I sent up the clearest and most exhaustive statement of this case that I was capable of making. All the reply I got was that "My case had not been made out." I did not cease in season—sometimes perhaps out of season—representing our needs, with no result. I went on furlough, and applied on return to go back to the Sonthal Pergunnahs. My request was granted, but at the same time some subordinate sent me, through a friend, a message of warning that if I continued crying out about establishment, I should be sent away and replaced by some one else more discreet. This was a nice welcome back, the more so as we had a new Lieutenant-Governor. I soon found out that the message was not from Headquarters, but from the department, as, on replying, through my friend, that I regarded this as a threat, and would lay the matter before the Lieutenant-Governor, I got a second message asking me to say nothing—the first "meant nothing." So I said nothing.

The Lieutenant-Governor himself inspected that subdivision soon after, and on the spot raised the number of its clerical staff from three to eight, proving that we must have had an overwhelming case. Now, why did the department say that my case was not made out? Why did that "fly on the wheel" try to gag me with threats? If the

need was seen, but the cost could not be spared, it was not honest to deny the need: if the department honestly believed that no need had been proved, that only shows how blind it could be to facts that, if it could see at all, could hardly escape its notice.

The last of my instances touches a department on a higher plane—even in the supreme Government of India. It will be remembered that in the days when I was at Serampore the Government of Bengal refused to allow tolls on metalled roads as a means of making them self-supporting. When I had been some time in the Sonthal Pergunnahs, we had a visit from the Lieutenant-Governor, who permitted me to send up proposals for tolls on the Sonthal Pergunnahs roads.

I sent in my proposals, but they were buried under a general discussion for the whole province, and came to nothing. The next Lieutenant-Governor, impressed with our needs, actually gave me leave to try an experimental scheme, but at the last moment, confessing to a violent personal prejudice against tolls on roads, withdrew it. Some years after, in the time of Sir John Woodburn, I spent much time and labour, which I could ill spare, in drawing up a comprehensive scheme of the roads needed in our District, and an estimate of their cost. Our schemes and estimates were usually limited by the means we had for carrying them out. As I wanted to open the eyes of the Government to the whole of the facts,

I disregarded this limit entirely. The scheme was not excessive or unreasonable, and yet the estimated cost was a hundred-fold more than our means.

I sent this to Government, asking, not for a money grant, but for leave to see what could be done with tolls to make our main roads self-supporting. Sir John Woodburn thought well enough of the request to send it on to the Government of India, whose leave, he thought, it was necessary to obtain, with a recommendation that it should be allowed. In its reply the Government of India made no objection to the principle of tolls, and did not mention my scheme of roads. The reply was to this effect : " We observe that the cost of establishment in this District is an unduly high proportion of its fund. Savings should be made on that. We also notice that the District Officer had a large unspent balance at the end of the last financial year, and consider that he ought not to have asked for more funds when he could not spend what he had."

Now, as a matter of fact, our establishment charges were under constant and close scrutiny, and could not bear further reduction. The reason why we had an unspent balance at the close of the year was that we did not get our allotment till within a month of the last day ; and that did not leave us time to call for tenders, settle contracts, and spend the money before the year ended.

But supposing the two reasons had been better founded than they were, the letter was no answer to our statement of needs ; and was, in my opinion, discourteous to the Lieutenant-Governor, one of the great officers of the Empire. And, moreover, the letter was final. On these flimsy and ill-founded pretexts the question was closed. Once again my labour of months was blown away by a puff of departmental breath. I could multiply instances, but there is no need. These will explain why for me the trouble was not the doing of things, but the getting leave to do them.

The instances given may all be traced to the attitude of mind shown by my politician friend at home when he said : “ *You* know the *little* things, but *we* know the *big* things.”

It is an attitude we all resent in our superiors, and most of us take towards those below us. I have done both.

The danger of this attitude is two-fold. It develops in the superior intolerance of a subordinate who will not at once fall in with his views ; and it tempts the subordinate to sink his own opinions, and make himself a mere echo of those of his superior. Many officials are ambitious ; many are so much in the power of the superior that they feel they dare not provoke him to anger. To all such the temptation to suppress their own intelligence and become mere instruments of others is very great, when subservience passes for loyalty. .



I have more than once during my service seen a tendency that way, and have written this chapter in the belief that the best and most loyal service I can render to the Government is not to ignore it, but to point it out.

## X

### BUILDING UP THE FOUNDATION

IT will thus be seen that, like Nehemiah and his people, we had to build in the presence of unfriends who could do, and were inclined to do, much to hinder our work. Perhaps this was not altogether an evil, since opposition serves to improve the stability of the work. We had first to make good the foundation we already had—the village head-man. I have said that there were some 8000 head-men in the six subdivisions. We had to make sure from time to time that each of them was a man acceptable to the village, acceptable to the Government, and doing his duty.

It was necessary to avoid as much as possible dismissing the head-man, especially in small villages, where there were seldom others fit for the post. But there were cases in which he had to be deprived of the “key of the village door,” even if there were no one else to take charge of it. He must not be a criminal; nor an oppressor. He must not alienate the village land, or get into the power of, and betray the village to the money-lender. He must faithfully guard the settlement,

and must pay to the landlord the village rent. The Subdivisional Officer took cognizance of all cases of misconduct of head-men, and sent those cases in which punishment seemed to be necessary to the Deputy Commissioner, who himself passed orders in every case.

My own strong desire was to carry on with the same man if possible, both because of the limited choice of successors, and because of the evil effect of making the head-man's position precarious. Unless in each case of dismissal we had the people with us, the system was weakened at its very foundation.

The head-man very often held land as his official remuneration. This passed with the office, and helped to strengthen the position of the new man. The heirs of a dismissed head-man were not entitled to succeed. The fear of dismissal, and of this consequence, was the best deterrent we had against misconduct on the part of the head-man. Besides dismissal for misconduct, death or physical or mental unfitness was a cause every year of many vacancies. In such a case, the next heir, except in bazaars, succeeded as of right. But the change of name had to be recorded. In case of dispute the question of right had to be settled; for there was no division of the office. Many questions arose and were decided, after inquiry, in consultation with the villages concerned. Some of them were very quaint. One of the first cases that came before me was that of a head-man who

had died at a very advanced age—over eighty—whose son, a grey-haired elder of sixty, was proposed as his successor. But another claimant stepped in in the person of the widow, an aged but vigorous dame.

I mildly represented that she, as a woman, was hardly qualified for the post. One of the duties was to arrest thieves, and she could not be expected to do that.

“Can’t I!” exclaimed the old lady fiercely. “Try me!”

Again I pointed out that obviously the right man for the post was her elderly son, already mentioned.

“That boy!” cried the dame. “He’s far too young to be trusted!”

She was passed over, nevertheless, and the son was appointed.

If the old lady had had such a thing as a banner inscribed “Woman’s rights,” it would have been waved defiantly that day in the faces of the assembled males of the village!

The election of a head-man was a delicate and a difficult work. There was usually only one possible man for the post, and he had to be searched for. I never entrusted the inquiry to any but a “Hakim,” who would by perseverance generally manage in the end to get hold of the right man. But the search often lasted for some time—in one case, I remember, for two years.

There is one election which stands out in my

memory for the Sonthal Pergunnahs as the Begumpore election does for Serampore—the Barhait election.

Barhait was the largest bazaar in the Damin. A bazaar is a village of shops, artisans, merchants and markets—not agricultural; a village of Hindoos and Mahomedans—“Dikkoos”—surrounded by Sonthals. It was near here that the great rebellion began.

The office of “Choudhry,” as the head-man of a bazaar is called, was vacant, and a Choudhry had to be elected—the post, like that of the “Manjhi,” not being hereditary.

The election would ordinarily have been held by the Subdivisional Officer; but as I was there in camp I thought I had better hold it myself to save time. The orders were that one of the villagers—here “Dikkoos”—should be elected as Choudhry. I had beside me the “Pargana,” or over-chief, of the Sonthal villages which surrounded the bazaar.

I sat on a chair in the shade of the rest-house, with the people in the sun before me.

First, the people of the bazaar were sorted out from those of the surrounding villages, who had come to look on, and made to sit on the ground.

I then explained that we were met to choose their Choudhry—their chief, a “Dikkoo,” one of themselves—and called for nominations.

Two candidates were named—one a very fussy and forward Mahomedan, and the other a Hindoo

merchant of the bazaar. Then I permitted the candidates and their friends to address the electors, which I think one man at least did. A show of hands was called for, first for one, then for the other. But only one or two hands were held up for either. The great majority made no sign. Then I tried another way. Setting A on one side and B on the other, I told all the voters who were for A to go to his side, and those for B to go to him. One or two rose and changed places: the great majority sat still. Determined to get an expression of opinion, I drew a line across the middle of the seated voters.

"Now," said I, "I am going to count all that I find on this side of the line for A, and all on that side for B."

One or two got up and crossed the line; the rest sat stolidly still. Plainly there was not much enthusiasm for either A or B.

"Is there no other person in the village whom the people would like better to have?" I asked.

Yes, they said. There were one or two leading merchants, but they had refused to stand.

I sat staring at the people, scratching my mental head, and wondering what I had better do next. The thing was falling flat: my election was going to be a failure. Then one of the villagers took his courage in both hands, and rose.

"The fact is," he said, "that there is only one man whom we want for our Choudhry, and there he stands beside you—Boloram Pargana."

“But,” I objected, “he is a Sonthal, and ye are Dikkoos. It is only right that a Dikkoo bazaar should have a Dikkoo Choudhry.”

No, they did not want a Dikkoo Choudhry; they wanted Boloram.

I again objected. “He is the Pargana, and the order is that the same man cannot be Pargana and Choudhry.”

At this word the faces of the people, which had begun to light up, became dull again.

“We cannot do with any other,” persisted the spokesman. “It is our custom. His father, Sham Pargana, was our Choudhry, and we want Sham’s son to fill Sham’s place.”

Well, the order was my own, and I could disobey it if I chose; so, following the precedent of Alonzo Money, I said:

“Ah, if it is the custom, that alters the case. I always respect custom. Well, be it so. You may have Boloram if he is willing to serve.” And I turned to Boloram, who—with the same modest demeanour with which, ten years before, Nabagopal Ghose had acknowledged the favour of his people—bowed assent. There was no indifference now. The whole assembly jumped at me; and I shall never while I live forget the eager delight, even to tears, which shone in the sea of glistening eyes fixed on mine. It was an election by acclamation. I may remark that the election proved a success.

This is a specimen of hundreds of elections.

which I and my officers were holding year after year. I have described it at some length : for one thing, because I remember it so well ; and for another, because of its many instructive points. Here are the points :

First, The danger of *not getting the proper man* to come forward.

We had two candidates, neither of whom was the man wanted. If there had been only one, he might possibly have been appointed without the formality of voting.

Second, The danger of *mechanical voting*.

Had I followed home precedents, though few voted for either, one of the two might have been declared elected.

Third, The influence of *fear*.

It was not stupidity that kept the people dumb, but fear. One of the candidates was, as I afterwards learnt, suspected of consorting with desperate characters. The people feared to offend him in case he should take his revenge afterwards.

Next to God, men fear the devil. Next to—even more than—the Hakim, they fear the bad character. By assuming that silence means assent, we run the risk of handing over the village to the keeping of a tyrant instead of a guardian.

Fourth, The *real interest* of the people.

The people seated before me appeared stolid, indifferent, densely stupid. But it was the very strength of their anxiety that kept them still:

Why did they not speak ? Because the order



was to choose one of themselves, and their wish was for an outsider.

Fifth, The danger of *exaggerating* the strength of *race feeling*.

It was known that Sonthals hated to be under the rule of a "Dikkoo," since in their experience the only object the Dikkoo ever had was to suck them dry.

As little would I have thought that "Dikkoos" would have accepted for their ruler a man of Sonthal race—a race which they despised. There was, of course, a reason—that the Pargana, and he alone, could keep the peace between the bazaar and its Sonthal neighbours. Still, the choice was unlooked for and remarkable. This case helps to show the broad wisdom of Yule's Police rules, in which there is no mention of race at all.

Sixth, The importance of getting the *right man*.

Had the wrong man—especially if he was a bad character—been chosen, the people would have submitted, and things would have gone wrong. They were wild with delight, not only for what they had got, but for what they had escaped from. If the importance of the matter be measured by the feelings of the people concerned, it was enormous.

The supreme importance of getting the right man has been driven deep into my mind by the experience of hundreds of cases.

Seventh, *Discretion* is needful. Had the election been held by a petty official who felt bound to go

by his orders, we should never have known, and never have gratified, the real wish of the bazaar.

Eighth, *Periodical elections impracticable.*

Under the settlement the office of head-man was hereditary, and this was according to the genius of the people. Even here in the bazaar, among "Dikkoos," the same condition was popular.

This made periodical elections out of the question. Even had they been desired, we had no agency for holding them. There were only sixteen "Hakims" in the district, all busy men, and they could not have found time to preside at the 8000 elections, nor was the duty one which could be safely left to minor officials.

The maintenance in working order of this great body of head-men—the inquiries, punishment, elections, and other proceedings it involved—was itself a very heavy task. But in so far as we succeeded, a Hakim was provided in each village—a Hakim, like the Deputy Commissioner. The area in which he ruled was small, his powers were limited, but he was on the same plane—a higher plane than that of clerks, sub-inspectors, and other minor officials of the Government.

## XI

### ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

THAT the year 1886 was a critical year in the story of the Sonthal Pergunnahs, and that for many a year after danger continued to threaten us, the following short account of events will show.

Thirty years before, the District of Sonthal Pergunnahs had been born, a child of blood.

Fourteen years before, the settlement law had been passed to save it from more bloodshed.

The peace the settlement was to secure, from confidence in which Doomka was denuded of troops, had been broken in 1881, only five years before, by the Census troubles, and troops were poured in to restore it.

In 1886 the alienation excitement was approaching its climax. How it would end no man could tell; but money-lenders were streaming out of the District, crying that it was another "hool."

The recruiting of coolies for the Assam tea-gardens was not an evil in itself. Fraudulent recruiters, however, were sneaking into the villages, enticing away bread-winners, whose families were left behind to starve, and taking young women

from parents or husbands. Such recruiters were detested, and the whole District was irritated by their conduct.

We were about to undertake a revision of the settlement, with a survey, a thing never before ventured on in the Sonthal Pergunnahs. How would it be taken?

There was one crisis when clouds seemed to be gathering round us on every side. Two great settlements were being carried out in the Pakour subdivision, one of Ambar, the other of Sultanabad.

Rumours of unrest came from the latter, where the subordinate survey staff were suspected of having accepted from the Sonthal tenants large bribes to enter false measurements, and then, fearing detection if they did so, entered the correct figures.

In Ambar, one Futteh Sonthal, a Pargana who had been dismissed for misconduct, got up an agitation against the settlement. He gathered subscriptions; he went about with a strong guard of bowmen and axemen, ordering all who did not join to be mobbed. When he was arrested by the Police, the very servants of the landlord whose estates we were settling rescued him and let him go. With great trouble he was again caught and brought to Doomka for trial. I well remember, on the days when he was on trial before a Magistrate, sitting in my court-room, and watching a crowd of over a thousand men, each with a stick in his hand, that filled the precincts of the Court. Were they there to attempt a rescue? That was

whispered, and we doubled the prisoner's guards. We had to sit and wait, hoping that, as was indeed the case, they were only anxious about the subscriptions Futteh had collected and not accounted for. The excitement of Futteh's agitation spread across the Damin into Godda, whence came reports that markets were being looted. It was the time for collecting the Government rent, and the Godda rents were not coming in. We were very short of Police in Godda, and asked for help: we were refused it. The Subdivisional Officer had to act with such resources as he had. Accompanied by the European Forest Officer, who happened to be with him, he rode out to his chief bazaar, then threatened, picking up a scratch party of men on the way, and saved the bazaar, just as the loot was beginning. At headquarters, with all these things, and more, we had an anxious time.

The Census of 1891 drew near, and the storms of 1881 might be repeated—storms which spring up in a night, without warning.

In 1889 we had a touch of famine, and then realised that, owing to the extension over the high-lying ridges of the rice fields, which used to be confined to well-watered hollows, the whole District was exposed to the risk of famine. Seven years later we had famine in real earnest. Famine gives trouble on all sides. On the Police side the chief trouble was grain robberies. Gangs of men took to looting the traders' stores. A worse evil that we dreaded was road robberies. The centre of the

District drew its main supply from Beerbhoom in the south. Day and night long lines of full carts crawled north, bringing food for the hungry villages, and if anything—the looting of a few of these carts, for instance—occurred to interrupt the supply, that meant starvation. I was never better pleased at anything than at being able to say, when the pinch was over, that all through those anxious days and nights not a grain cart was robbed. Again, there were still among us the *Kherwars*, or puritan Sonthals; any day we might hear of a slaughter of live stock, and that the *Kherwars* were on the warpath.

They were a strangely spiritual people, these Kherwars. I remember one Sunday morning in camp we were strolling about, and met an old man, who said he had been a Kherwar. We sat down on a grassy bank together, and began chatting.

“So you wanted to take the ‘Raj’ from us,” I said.

“Oh no,” said the old man, “we had no idea of doing that.”

“Who told you to leave off eating fowls and drinking liquor?” I asked.

“No man,” he replied.

“What made you do it, then?” I asked.

“Something within told me, and I had to obey,” he said.

And thus on that Sunday morning, in those remote fields, we met with “Conscience.”

I was much struck with another instance of the power of conscience.

As I sat in my office one day, there came before me two sturdy, half-naked, pleasant-faced men, whose shaggy topknots proclaimed them Sonthals of the old style.

"Whence come ye, and what do you want?" I asked.

"We be disciples of Jesai Ram," said one, naming a well-known hermit who lived in the heart of the Godda Hills, sixty miles away. "Ten years ago Cotter Sahib lent our master two rupees, and we have by his order brought the two rupees to pay back."

"Cotter Sahib," said I, "has been away from this country many years, and ye cannot go to him; neither will he expect the money after so long. Take it back, therefore, to your master."

"That we cannot do," was the answer. "Our master's order was to leave it, and leave it we must."

So it ended in my taking the money and sending it on to Jesai Ram's creditor by a money order.

Jesai Ram never left his home, but sat there giving good advice to all the many Sonthal pilgrims who resorted to him. From time to time he used to send me letters full of exhortations to practise virtue. In fact, though he was not a Christian, his doctrines were Christian doctrines, and I believe that he was a practical Christian without knowing it.

The Sonthals stood out conspicuous among other races for their unworldliness and honesty. The danger in dealing with them was their very loyalty, for they were intensely clannish and secretive, and when anything was wrong they did not whine, but avoided the "Hakims," keeping silence. They were children in the quickness of their passions, with the strength of men—not valuing life. Crime of sudden violence was common among them, though fraud was rare. They were loyal to Bhagirath, to Futteh the boycott leader, to Jesai Ram, or any other leader that gained influence over them. They were loyal to any Hakim who gained their confidence—to the person, not the office.

I have not said much about the ordinary run of Police work. We had our full share of crime, from murder and dacoity downwards, and, as will have been gathered, small means for dealing with it. In all the neighbouring Districts the Sonthal Pergunnahs was looked on as Alsatia—a safe refuge where bad characters went and got lost. The reputation fixed on us by the Police department was perhaps worse than we deserved—yet not wholly without justification.

To return to 1886.

The work crying out most urgently to be done was the setting in order of our Police system.

It was for the Government to lay down a policy.

The Police department was bent on making



our Police system uniform with that of neighbouring Districts, and dropping what they regarded as our fantastic attempt at substituting village head-men for professional officers. The Sonthal officers, on the other hand, were all against parting with that priceless aid to justice—the co-operation of the people.

The Government was in no hurry to make up its mind. That in itself was a feather in my cap, for all through these weary discussions here was a system which the Police department declared unworkable working. It was not till the year 1894 that the first stage of the controversy ended in my being called on to formulate my scheme. With the aid of my District Superintendent of Police, and all my officers, I drew up a very complete scheme, which I hoped would find favour even with the Police department, so completely did it provide for doing all that the Police wanted done.

I was disappointed : the Government would not accept it, though I gave what proof I could of confidence in it by offering to stay on in the Sonthal Pergunnahs, and work it (for I was about to go on furlough, and in the usual course, having been in the District for eight years, would not have come back to it).

I shall explain shortly the points of my scheme. The object was to bring into touch the head-men and the Government Hakims.

Our first need was circle officers, under whom to group the head-men. We had existing material

for these which I proposed to utilise. In Deoghur and Jamtara there were the Ghatwals and Sardars, who had land ; in the Damin there were Hill chiefs with stipends, and parganas with commission on the rents ; and among the Sonthali villages outside the Damin, in all Doomka, part of Godda, and nearly all Pakour, other parganas who had influence, though their position was not so good as that of the parganas in the Damin.

The Ghatwals, Sirdars, Hill chiefs, and parganas covered nine-tenths of the District. For the rest—the non-Sonthal fringe in Godda, Rajmahal, and Pakour—I proposed to appoint circle officers.

I took the circle officers as they were, with great charges and small, averaging thirty square miles, and reckoned that we should have 180 of them in the District.

Following the rules of 1856, I made the unit territorial, not racial. But, owing to the small size of many villages, I took as unit, not the village, but a group of villages averaging three square miles in area. I proposed to form all the head-men of the group, or “Union” as I called it, into a “punchayet,” with the circle officer for president, and to give each of the head-men powers throughout the Union, thus getting rid of the “isolated Manjhi.”

The circles themselves were too numerous, and I further proposed to group them in “wards,” having an average area of 100 square miles. For the ward there was to be a “punchayet” consist-

ing of all the circle officers, and such influential residents in it as the District Officer might appoint. There were to be fifty-four of these for the District. At the ward headquarters there was to be a building, for a meeting-place, and an office. Here the punchayet was to hold a parade of the village watch on fixed days, and also transact its own business.

This ward punchayet was the instrument on the side of the people that was to be in direct contact with the Hakims. On the side of the Government, Hakims were to be provided, and we agreed to make use of Police officers of the rank of Inspectors and upwards, but not of lower rank.

The details were all very thoroughly worked out; and I would have been only too glad to have had the duty of introducing and working the scheme—a tedious and troublesome task, but to me a labour of love.

The Police had their scheme. It was more costly than ours, and would have upset instead of utilising the system we had had in the Sonthal Pergunnahs for nearly forty years. It was for the Government to choose between the schemes, and quite time that something were done.

But nothing was done.

My scheme was not accepted; neither was the scheme of the Police department approved.

No third plan was, so far as I am aware, ever considered. During the six years more that I served in the Sonthal Pergunnahs I had the un-

pleasant and unprofitable task of endeavouring, without credit and with very moderate success, to avoid a breakdown with the old, out-of-date, condemned machinery which the Police department and we in the Sonthal Pergunnahs alike repudiated. It was a moral victory for us. During those six years we heard no more of our system being superseded by the regular Police. At their close we were engaged in preparing a law, which was finally passed after I left, confirming and strengthening our system of circle officers. I regard this as the second stage of the controversy, and feel that if I had been left in the Sonthal Pergunnahs six years more, we might possibly have made good another step. And I was, at the beginning of my time in the Sonthal Pergunnahs, sanguine enough to think that we should have all settled in time for the Census of 1891 !

The only inference I could draw from the facts was that the Police department were determined that if they could not get their way we should not have ours, and were strong enough to carry out that purpose.

## XII

### PLANS FRUSTRATED

OUR scheme hung up ; the Police scheme hung up ; no visible outcome of all the toil and thought spent in planning and contriving save a certain number of cubic feet of papers, printed and written, lumbering the shelves of half a dozen offices. Not an ounce of our burden had been lifted from our shoulders ; not a finger raised to help us in bearing it.

There were no signs that our needs were realised. When the Government Police in other Districts were improved, ours were left as before ; and our staff of officers was again and again weakened to breaking point.

The ordinary rules of fair dealing did not seem to apply to our case. Thus I was asked if I could undertake the duties of Sessions Judge in addition to all my other work. I said I could, if I got a Joint Magistrate to do for me what I used to do for my chief in Midnapore. I got the work to do, but no Joint Magistrate. When the strain of work during the famine was becoming unbearable, I learnt that they were making ready,

not to help me, but to replace me when I broke down.

However, it was our duty, if we could not get the means we wished for, to do what we could with the means we had. I left the Police tracts—Deoghur, and the parts of Godda, Rajmahal, and Pakour outside the Damin—to their skeleton Police force, and took in hand the Damin, Doomka, and Jamtara. For these we managed to work out an organisation something like that contemplated in the scheme. We had our Sirdars and Parganas; and a beginning was made with parade centres, though we could have neither the Unions nor the wards contemplated in the scheme; and we had no funds to spend. We did what we could, by weeding out unsuitable men, to improve the personal qualifications of our circle officers, head-men, and village watch; and so far as we could with our imperfect means of supervision, we made use of the great advantage our system gave us over the regular Police.

I was never one of those who regarded the regular Police as human fiends who rejoiced in acts of trickery and torture. Nevertheless, I think that the system under which they worked was such as to drive them to the use of shady methods. Our system was a great improvement on it. Let me, to illustrate my meaning, give an account of one or two cases dealt with under our rules—all of the first importance.

The first case is one of dacoity—gang burglary—from Jamtara.

One night the watchman of a certain village came to his circle Sirdar and reported that three bad characters of the village had just left their homes, he suspected for a bad purpose.

The Sirdar assembled some of the honest villagers, and laid an ambush into which, in the early dawn, the three men fell on their return with bundles of stolen property on their heads. In the surprise of the moment they admitted that they had taken part in a dacoity, and gave up the names of their accomplices. These lived in another circle.

The circle Sirdar went at once and called the Sirdar of the other circle, and the two, searching the houses of those named, discovered a large quantity of stolen property. While the morning was still young, two cartloads of stolen property and a gang of prisoners, under a strong escort of village watchmen, were on their way to Jamtara, where the owner, who lived in a third circle, found them when he went that afternoon to complain.

Under the ordinary Police system, the Police would not have got news of the occurrence at soonest till the forenoon after the dacoity, and would not have begun the investigation till that evening.

If they then traced the actual thieves, they were not likely to find the property, which would

have been disposed of long before. If they did not suppress the report of the occurrence, they would be sorely tempted to cook up a false proof rather than own their impotence—all the more if they were satisfied that they had got the actual offenders, for in that case local opinion would be with them.

The next case occurred in the Police tract of Pakour. A party of Hindoo peasants from the East were on their way to the cattle market of Hiranpore to buy cattle, each with his money tucked into his waist-cloth. They were joined by two men professing to be Brahmins, who honoured them with their company and condescended to accept from them some attentions. At nightfall the peasants and the “Brahmins” encamped beside a tank near a Sonthal village, and began to prepare their evening meal. Professing a desire to make the peasants some return for their attentions, the “Brahmins” offered them sugar to mix with their food. The gift was accepted, and the peasants took their supper. Now these “Brahmins” were really thieves, and the sugar was datura powder, whose property is to take away first the sight and voice and then the consciousness of those who eat, and it keeps them unconscious for twenty-four hours. So of the peasants some lay unconscious, and some were groping about blind and dumb. The thieves at once began to go through their waist-cloths for their money. The first man searched had not lost consciousness, for the drug



had made him sick, and he had brought some of it up. He grappled with one of the thieves, who could not at once get away, and the other, disturbed by the approach of the villagers, fled with the man's money.

The villagers found the thief who could speak and the honest man who was dumb and blind with the drug struggling together; and of the others some groping about, blind and dumb, and some unconscious. The thief tried to persuade them that it was he that was being robbed. But the Manjhi decided to detain every one till the Police should come. He searched the ailing men, and took charge of their money. The thief, who was a plausible rascal, tried by threats, coaxing, bribery, and every way he could think of to get away, but in vain. He passed money under his cloth to the Manjhi seated beside him on a log. "See here, brothers," cried the bluff Manjhi, holding up the coins, "there's something wrong about this. He's trying to bribe me!"

The man was duly handed over to the Police; the money of the peasants duly accounted for; and in the end the second thief caught.

It turned out that these were two notorious criminals, who were wanted by the Police in several Districts. But for the prompt action of the Manjhi they would most likely have both been out of reach before the Police could have begun to take up the case, for the peasants would not have been able to speak for many hours.

I remember another case—of murder by poison, where the Pargana was on the spot before the death of the victim, scraped up the evacuations, collected the evidence, and arrested the criminal. The Police could not have done better.

These are all important Hakim's cases, for which a Police officer would drop other work and hasten to the spot. In the more frequent and pettier classes of cases—thefts of grain, crop, cattle, and small articles—the comparative efficiency of the indigenous agency was greater; for the Police often in such cases refused to investigate.

Mr. Grant went so far as to say that, even in the Police tract, the only cases detected were detected by the villagers, though the Police always readily took the credit. It was not that the village head-man was the cleverer detective; but he was on the spot; he had the sympathy and help of the whole neighbourhood, and, as things of this kind were rare events in a village, he gave the case his full attention.

Though the Government did not take its proper part in co-operation, and withheld its legal sanction to the organisation of the Hakims of the people, we managed to get on fairly well with our comparatively unskilled but ubiquitous staff.

"I am no philanthropist," wrote one Inspector-General of Police to me during our discussions. "Give me Police and 'budmashes'" (bad characters), "and I am content."

There lay the difference between the depart-

ment's ideal and that which I tried to keep before me.

The Police work was the most important and urgent, but only one of many uses for which I wanted an organised people.

I was thinking of many other things besides the Police when I gave this chapter the title of "Plans Frustrated"—frustrated, I would fain believe, for the time only.

"Had I plantation of this isle, my Lord"—

It is a common, and not always profitable exercise to speculate, with good old Gonzalo, what one would do with a free hand.

In this case, however, I had all but got my free hand; I was hoping soon to get it; and I had not only thought out plans for the future but had begun carrying them out. I still hope that many of them will yet come to something.

This, therefore, seems an appropriate place to touch lightly on the various developments I looked forward to in the immediate future. In the more remote future there might be other and grander visions, but too vague for a record of experiences.

## XIII

### WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

IN this chapter I propose to sketch the design of the scheme, which, had I found favour with the Government, I hoped to have in full working order within the next five years.

It was a design made with eight years' practical experience of the conditions, and with the sense of responsibility felt by one who has not only designed the ship, but has also offered to build and sail her.

The thing sought was an improved instrument of local Government. Its principle was to be partnership between the Crown and the people. Though the instrument itself was the main object, the more duties we could find for it the better; for there is nothing like constant use to keep an instrument bright and make it efficient. The instrument was to be made out of two component parts—the part furnished by the people, and the part furnished by the Crown.

The people's part—head-men disciplined, organised in their Unions, and linked through their circle officers with the ward punchayet. The weekly

ward parade, attended by head-men, circle officers, watchmen and people, and sometimes by the Government Hakim.

For the Crown—Hakims with time and opportunity and the will to be on friendly terms with the people.

The essence of the plan was the union of those two parts; the closing of the gap between them, and the removal of that fringe of subordinate police, clerks, process-servers, petty lawyers, and other parasites which was keeping them apart.

*The village watch*, instead of being hangers-on of the subordinate Police, and many of them absent from their beats two nights in every fourteen, would attend the weekly parade near their villages and be subordinate to their proper officers, the circle chiefs.

*Investigation of crime* to be prompt—an immediate hue and cry, a hot scent, the whole countryside helping, and a good chance of catching the real offender. No calling in of paid Crown servants except in really important cases; and for these a strong staff of well-trained and good detectives.

*Discipline of village officials* to be administered at the ward centre, in ordinary cases by the ward punchayet; in important cases with the help of a Hakim. Thus much inconvenience and expense would be saved to all concerned.

*Vital statistics* to be recorded for each ward area at the ward centre, relieving the Government of all work save that of compiling ward totals.

*Bad characters*, who were now under most imperfect supervision, to be closely supervised and tightly held in hand by the ward punchayet, backed by the full power of local public opinion.

*Processes* to be served, property attached and taken charge of, prisoners arrested, and sales held by the ward punchayet and the Unions, who would get a share of the process fees for their trouble. This would rid us of the worst and least manageable part of our "fringe."

*Justice*—A Bench to sit at each ward centre for dealing with all minor cases, civil and criminal. Only difficult and important cases would be reserved for Crown officers, and of these most would also be tried locally. My experience of the judicial temper of our village officials, derived from observation of their conduct as assessors at the Sessions Court and as arbitrators, gave me good hopes of success in this direction, which would mean a great saving all round, both to people and Government.

I pictured to myself also scenes at parade such as I have witnessed in camp—half a dozen arbitration groups, each under its tree, settling as many cases.

A flexible system of *local rating* for raising money to supply local wants—such as payment of the village watch, roads, bridges, schools, wells, drains, or other good objects.

There being no such system in existence in

Bengal outside municipalities, I devised a plan on the following lines :—

*The Valuation Roll.*—Prepared at ward parade, Union by Union, on the basis (adopted in existing laws) of means of assessees.

Assessees to be in classes, from day-labourers upwards—all in the same class paying the same tax. To villagers with local knowledge this mode of assessment would be easy.

*The Budget* also to be prepared in ward meeting.

The various objects for expenditure, whether for the whole or for a part of the ward, and the sum needed for each, to be first considered. The sums fixed to be debited to the whole ward, or a special Union or group of Unions, according to the benefit to be derived.

The whole demand for all objects on each Union to be consolidated into one. The demand of the Union to be distributed on its assessees according to the Valuation Roll.

*Demand sheet* to be prepared for each Union separately, with a wide space opposite the name of each ratepayer.

*Local revenue stamps* to be prepared, coloured, and shaped so that an unlettered man could tell their nature and value. These stamps would be on sale by all stamp vendors. Ratepayers would be at liberty to buy them when and where they might please. Each ratepayer would affix stamps of the value of his tax in the space opposite his name.

The lists would then be collected by the ward punchayet from the Unions, and sent to the Government Office.

*A local accounts staff* would be formed for dealing with all the accounts of the District. It would receive and examine the lists, calculate the value of the stamps, and, deducting a sum to cover the various costs, credit the balance to the ward in the Government Treasury. I prepared and submitted a scheme for this, but it fell to the ground with my main scheme.

*A pound* at each ward centre, managed by the punchayet.

*Schools.*—I hoped that the ward punchayets would infuse new life into the schools, improve buildings and the position of teachers, and arouse local interest.

*Grain Banks.*—One point in the relations of debtor and creditor was that the peasant was always debtor. His creditor advanced him grain in July and took back double weight at harvest time, six months later. The *Grain Bank* was a device to change this.

It was a granary in charge of a head-man. Here peasants were allowed to deposit grain at harvest time, and got it back, with a small deduction for cost of storage and watching, in the rainy season, when grain was dear. We took deposits only from men who were not in debt. If any grain was not removed, it was sold: the granary was completely cleared every season.



In this plan there were the following ideas :—

*First*, the peasant became his own creditor.

*Second*, if deposits were left to fructify in the granary, here was the germ of a bank.

*Third*, the bank could lend money to a depositor on the security of his deposit.

*Fourth and chief* was the idea of drawing the traders into a business of moderate profits, larger transactions, and less risk. This might be if the trader could be persuaded to accept, and the peasant to make, deposits, instead of the present practice of advances. In my opinion the peasant could never do without the money-lender. It was all very well when things went smoothly ; but when the pinch came—failure of crops, death or sickness of men or cattle, litigation, marriage expenses, or other compelling causes, to whom but the money-lender could he turn ?

I hoped to see reputable money-lenders (and there are such men) doing good business at moderate rates, with resources increased by the deposits of their peasant clients. I had even fixed on one or two suitable men to make a start with, but got no further. The establishment of *Grain Banks* under ward punchayets was not possible without the punchayets ; so we contented ourselves with the two or three we had in the Government and wards' estates.

Other plans for the promotion of thrift hold the field to-day. I wish them success. But in

case they do not answer expectation, perhaps a use may be found for this plan of ours.

*Weights and Measures.* — The shopkeeper's weight most often met with was a round stone, and his measure of capacity for grain was a "pie" or wooden bowl, supposed to hold a pound of rice.

Many a trader had a large "pie" to buy with and a small one to sell with. Sometimes foreign matter was plastered inside the measure. From one "pie" found in a shop so much oilcake was scraped out that the "pie" would not hold the loose scrapings.

We tried to improve matters in the "Damin" (where Government was landlord) by selling at cost price measures of the standard capacity. The need for these was proved by the number bought, and by the introduction of false measures in imitation of them, which sold for double the price. I hoped to have at each ward centre a complete set of correct weights and measures, and to have all weights and measures not agreeing with them forbidden by law.

I hoped to have at each ward centre a *Dispensary*, in charge of a qualified medical man, with good medicines and instruments, and a bed or two; and cholera pills and fever mixtures for distribution to the Union punchayets. I hoped that the ward punchayets would give valuable help in the case of *epidemics* among men or animals. I hoped that in the ward and Union punchayets we should

have an organisation ready for *famine* or *census* work.

These are some uses to which our instrument was to be put; and will serve to illustrate the proposed method of its working. It will be observed that the items *village watch*, *investigation*, *bad characters*, *processes*, and *justice* are all different branches of the great public duty of *Justice*, for which the Government already made itself fully responsible. When any one of its millions of subjects made complaint against any other it felt bound to have an investigation and hold a trial, after the methods of English law. All the paraphernalia of English justice were reproduced—in name at least—judges, magistrates, clerks, process-servers, police, lawyers. But, unlike the Government in England, the Bengal Government, though it was poor and had more than twice as many individuals to deal with, attempted to do the whole work by means of its paid servants only.

This meant two great evils—an enormous expenditure of time paid for, and therefore an enormous cost to the Government, which the Court fees and fines did not nearly cover—and the employment of that huge army of underlings and parasites who formed the fringe that had to be removed before the two parts of the instrument could be properly joined. It will be seen that if the hopes we entertained were fulfilled, the chief difficulty in the way of making our instrument—the fringe—could be taken away.

Further, the change would relieve the Government of the cost of unnecessary staff—the fringe to be abolished—and the cost, in the shape of time, of its necessary officers. This double relief would enable the Crown, without additional cost to itself, to supply its part of our instrument—the part which, almost from the beginning of Yule's system it had, owing to the demands of other work, chiefly judicial, withheld.

It is always an important recommendation to a reform that it can be carried out with the savings it makes.

The other items were improvements in administration which our new instrument would make possible. Other improvements would come within sight as we went on. Once we got rid of the gap between Crown and people, and the fringe, there was no limit to the possibilities.

We might even be able to utilise our wasted resources in a way most profitable to both Crown and people. Examples of the possibilities in this direction are given in the next three chapters.

## XIV

### WASTED RESOURCES—ROADS

THERE are still some plans to be told—plans for picking up wealth that lay neglected at our feet, plans in which we needed the help of the ward and Union punchayets. The wealth was to come out of roads, water, and trees. Roads have many uses. Here we shall consider them as wealth-earners.

The road earns wealth by economising power. On the road a cart can carry a heavier load than it could with the same motive power carry on unprepared ground. A road's efficiency as a wealth-earner is according to the load it enables a cart to carry.

Roads vary in efficiency. They may be roughly divided into three classes :

The *track*, merely an open passage.

The *road*, made up, but soft, badly bridged, and badly graded.

The *highway*, as good as bridging, metalling, and grading can make it.

A maund is five-sevenths of a cwt.

An ordinary cart that could carry over a *track*

a load of six maunds could carry twelve maunds over a *road* and eighteen over a *highway*.

I take, as an example, our best road — the Doomka - Rampore Hat Road. This was only a *road*, 'not a *highway*, being soft and not fully bridged or well graded.

It was estimated, I believe, to have a traffic of about 200 carts a day.

The hire of a cart from Doomka to Rampore Hat was three rupees, and the load was twelve maunds. But for the road, double the number of carts would have been needed to carry the same weight. The road was thus earning over 200,000 rupees yearly. Whether this went to the buyers, or to the sellers, or to the carriers of the goods, or whether they divided it between them, we need not care. Money was being earned which, but for the road, no one would have got.

The public was losing 70,000 rupees more through the road not being a highway as surely as a more advanced community suffers loss for want of a needed railway. But that was only part of the loss. The feeders of this road were only tracks, or little better. The villages of the system, joined to it by such feeders, got little good from the road, because of the gap between. Much of their trade was smothered.

I reckoned that a highway with good feeders serving such a District as this road served ought to have been carrying 400 carts daily, and earning a profit of 800,000 rupees a year. An annual out-

lay of 40,000 rupees a year would have sufficed to keep such a highway with its feeders in order. We were spending 10,000 rupees a year. By saving a yearly sum of 30,000 rupees, therefore, we were losing at least ten times that sum yearly.

Similar losses were being incurred on our few other main roads that we could call *roads*, viz. those from Doomka to Soorie and Bhaugulpore, and from Doomka to Deoghur; still heavier losses on the remaining main roads of the District, which were little more than *tracks*; and heavier still in the many undeveloped parts which had nothing more than *tracks*, or lacked even these. It was my opinion that the District of Sonthal Pergunnahs was losing, because of the defective state of its road system, an income, to put it moderately, of not less than five million rupees a year. It was to save some of this that I strove so persistently to get our roads developed by making each main road as it was constructed self-supporting, and thus free our hands for attending to the next. The only means known to me for doing so was the turnpike toll. That is why I favoured it. It was to bring this unused resource to the notice of the Government that I prepared with so much care and toil the scheme of roads which the Lieutenant-Governor submitted to the Government of India for favourable consideration, and which went into the waste-paper basket, like a begging letter.

From the first I felt that no time was to be

lost in marking out our roads if they were to be, as was most desirable, measured in at the approaching revision of settlement. Main lines and feeders were of equal importance; but, the main line being more important than any one feeder, I began with the main lines. If we could not afford highways, we could have roads; and if not roads, then tracks—something to put in the settlement. Wherever I went I was always on the look-out for good lines. I made many journeys over lines where main roads were wanted, and often left behind a track where there had been none before that we knew of. We traced out and restored the lines of old main roads that had been lost, and improved those that were defective. In the Damin, for instance, Pontet's usual tracks lay along the sandy beds of rivers, crossing and recrossing them—easy enough going for his elephant, but not so good for a laden cart. We altered their lines to avoid the crossing of streams. People were very ready to help. We led our lines as far as possible along ridges useless for cultivation, where we got land without payment, and paid for the more valuable rice land when we had to take it. We made roads in all parts of the District, some of them forty, fifty, and sixty miles long.

In the Damin and the wards' estates, which we managed, we spent most of our development fund on road improvement, and encouraged the making of minor roads all over the District. Though my recollection is vague, I believe we got some two



thousand miles of road marked out for measuring in at the settlement.

The villagers of the Damin were bound by the terms of their leases to keep up the village roads. It was interesting to see how the road was marked out with stones in lengths, one for each village, and each village length in parts of a yard or two for each man. We paid only for bridges and bad crossings. Similarly, instead of sending overseers to measure up the work of surface repairs on our roads outside the Damin, which would have cost us as much as the repairs, we had maintenance contracts with village head-men, who were paid on the road being passed as in good order. It was these arrangements that caused the abnormal proportion of cost of establishment to outlay which brought on us the censure of the Government of India's clerk; for we had to appoint men to show the people what to do. The disproportion was due, not to dearness of establishment, but to cheapness of work done.

I proposed to make of each main road system a separate business concern. Once built and launched it would support itself by its earnings.

The cost of building it might be treated in one of three ways—either as money spent and done with, or as a debt to be repaid by a sinking fund, or as an investment paying interest. If it was to be on a business footing the first method was out of the question. I favoured the third, as giving a permanent income to the District fund. .

The revenue was to come from tolls on traffic. It would be used, first, to pay the sinking fund charge, or interest, as the case might be. Second, for maintenance of the road, including important feeders. Third, for improvements of the same. Fourth, for a reserve fund.

Surplus revenue, not needed for any of these purposes, should go to reduce toll charges. Tolls on roads should never be made, as had been tolls on ferries, a source of general revenue. The District road funds, formerly used for the maintenance of the road, were now available either to help with minor roads or to finance other schemes similar to this, on a small scale, by making grants from income, or on a larger, by contracting loans for the same purpose. The whole scheme being as yet untried, its details could not be adjusted until experience should be gained.

Simply as an illustration, however, I will suppose a case. We will suppose that we are launching the Doomka-Rampore Hat Road—38 miles long, and that it has cost 50,000 rupees to put the road into good order.

It has been decided to fix a toll of eight anas—the freight of two maunds—for the use of the whole length of the road. As the road enables a cart to carry twelve maunds more than it could without a road, the charge is not unfair. It is to be levied at four points, two anas at each point. We estimate the traffic at 200 carts a day. That gives a revenue of 36,000 rupees in the year.

Deducting 6000 for the cost of collection and leakage, and 2500 for interest on cost of equipment, we have left 27,500 rupees for maintenance, improvement, and reserve.

If the traffic goes down, and with it the income, so does the wear and tear and the cost of maintenance. If the traffic, and with it the cost of maintenance, goes up (as is to be expected with a good road and improvements), so does the revenue.

The difference between a main road and a minor road is a difference in the volume of traffic. Just as there are branches of some trees greater than the stems of others, so some feeders are greater than some main roads. A feeder that carries main road traffic is itself a main road, and to be maintained as such out of the toll fund.

The ward punchayets were expected, by the help of grants from funds, local gifts, and local rates to complete the system by making and maintaining the minor roads. Any cost to the locality is a very small fraction of the profits earned for it by the road.

Here, then, we have the tree—trunk, branches, and leaves, nourished by its own roots—a real Pagoda tree, blessing the land.

I think I could have made it grow, and would have given much for the chance of trying.

To show that I had, in this matter of tolls, support from men high in authority, I will quote two conversations I had.

The first was with Sir A. Mackenzie, Lieutenant-

Governor of Bengal, who had been my guest, and was leaving.

*Sir A.* "I will look again into this question of tolls."

*I.* "It is my fad, sir."

*Sir A.* "One of your fads!"

*I.* "The oldest."

And he laughed and drove off. That was two years before my proposal was sent to the Government of India.

The other conversation was with Sir J. Woodburn, when I was his guest, two years after its rejection. It was he who had sent it up, recommending that it should have a trial.

He told me he meant to have another dig at the tolls.

"Though the Government of India is so much against them, I had to pay toll twice on the road going up to Simla."

## XV

### WASTED RESOURCES—WATER

EVERY year we made ready to meet famine. One of our precautions was a programme of relief works.

The ordinary stand-by—embanked roads—not being wanted here, I decided to adopt, as the most fitting relief work on which to employ sufferers from famine, whose cause is failure of water, reservoirs for the storage of water.

Our most enlightened landlord, a European, spent large sums on “bandhs and daurs,” and was satisfied with the investment. A “bandh” is a reservoir made by damming the lower end of a hollow; and a “daur” is a distributary channel from the “bandh” to the fields. Bandhs were made everywhere, great and small, by landlords and tenants. My predecessors had even made embankments instead of bridges on some of our roads, forming lakes.

But all the water in all the reservoirs was but a trickle compared with the flood that the land cried out for. That more water was not stored was due to many causes.

There was, first, the Indian's dislike of insurance. The thought that in some seasons the water would not be used deterred him from spending money on its storage. If he had money he could get a higher return in other ways. Then capital was scarce: few had the money to spare.

Interests were divided. The site might be on one man's land, and the fields to be protected on that of another. The same cause gave rise to troublesome difficulties about way-leaves for distributaries. Then, owing to the Indian's proneness to neglect repairs, some reservoirs were burst by floods, and others silted up. Both these causes were the ruin of many fine "bandhs."

I remember one fall of six inches of rain in three hours—I was out in it—which burst all our fine embankments on the Rampore Hat and Soorie Roads; and, doubtless, innumerable others owned privately.

A tenant would also let a "bandh" silt up, or empty it, in order to cultivate its bed, wasting the insurance of many acres for the cropping of a few perches.

I spent much time in examining likely sites and devising a pattern reservoir at once capacious enough to be of real use, cheap, simple of construction, and safe from flood-burst and silt.

My plan was one of terraces—the main reservoir below, minor ones above, and above them regulating ridges, such as the peasants make for their fields. The upper "bandhs" would catch the silt,

and their leakage would make good the waste from evaporation in the main dam.

The main reservoir was to have “daurs,” or distributary channels, leading along the ridges on both sides to the fields. I submitted my plan to the Commissioner, for two reasons—one being that I wished to get my pattern approved before designing any more; the other because I wanted to make these reservoirs self-supporting, and even revenue-producing. The only way of doing that provided by law was the water-rate—a complicated method, and costly to work.

My plan was to sell the flow of water for a certain number of days, or for a whole season, if that seemed suitable, making the purchaser tenant for the time of all the distributaries, and leaving him to use the water or sell it to others at his pleasure.

The engineering question was referred to the engineer at Bhaugulpore, an eminent authority on hydraulics, who began by picking to pieces the plans and calculations of my engineer, not an eminent authority; putting conundrums, calling for statistics, and demanding a thorough survey of the whole catchment basin.

Years passed. He went away, leaving the question unsettled; and his successor refused to give an opinion till he had seen the place. He in his turn left, without having seen the site.

The next man went to the spot without letting us know, and utterly condemned the project. I

could not understand why, and persuaded him to go again with me. I walked him all over my site, and he then said he must have been shown the wrong place. This was quite a good project. He promised to put his revised opinion on record, but retired from the service soon after without doing so.

About this time I came to the conclusion that the next famine would be on us before I should have dragged an opinion on my pattern from our professional experts, and I reluctantly abandoned this form of relief work for others less desirable, but more commonplace.

One reservoir on this pattern, which we took the risk of making as a relief work, stood, and was, I believe, found useful.

The financial proposal met with much the same fate. It was novel ; it would need legislation. The pattern went into one pigeon-hole, and the financial scheme into another.

Looking at the importance of the ideas, I think our experts would have used their superior knowledge and brain power more worthily by showing how the difficulties could be overcome than by pointing them out and lying down to them. I cannot to this day see what the difficulties were. The embankments were only the kind of thing every landlord and every tenant knew how to make. No expert was really needed for them.

The financial work was equally simple—taking



a deposit at the treasury, and sending a man with the key to open and shut the sluices.

I had ideas of subsidiary sources of revenue—fish, fruit-trees, bamboos, grass, etc.

There was no limit to the development of this form of water-supply. We had, indeed, no such rivers as would enable us to make canals, but we had a minimum rainfall of thirty inches, rising in some years to seventy.

If we could make our reservoirs, as I proposed to make our turnpike roads, self-supporting, there was no reason why they should not expand just as far as they were needed to supply a public want, and be a real safeguard against famine by preventing it, instead of patching up the wreck it leaves behind.

Water acts like magic on the soil of the Sonthal Pergunnahs. I have seen a bare ridge that did not look as if it could grow a blade of grass turned into a paradise by means of two wells. With a good supply of water the annual produce of the Sonthal Pergunnahs might be easily raised in value by another five millions of rupees.

I had thought of a minor scheme, the carrying out of which might have been given to the punchayets. From our annual crop returns it appeared that the loss of the October rain meant the loss of one-fourth of the winter rice—our staple crop. An inch of rain in October saved that loss. My plan was to encourage the formation on the higher levels of large numbers of shallow ponds impounding rain-

water enough in September to provide in October the needful inch. The ponds would be cheap to make, as the water was for use in October and the loss by evaporation would be small. At the end of October they could be emptied, and cropped during the winter months. These were my plans for the storage of water.

I do not know if I am justified in even mentioning my plan for the checking of floods, so far was it from being developed. For I would have needed the help of the punchayets, which never came into being, and of engineer experts whom, failing the punchayets, I did not think it right to trouble. Yet the idea haunted me, and I spent many a spare hour playing with it. I believe it was practical, and could have been used. Accordingly I set it down.

It came from watching the methods of the natives—especially of the Sonthals, those unrivalled pioneers. It was based on certain simple facts. Floods are caused by the rushing together of newly-fallen rain, which, in our hilly and undulating country, rapidly gathers volume and speed. When it has gained a certain volume and velocity, the only thing is to let it go free. It cannot be checked.

Rain falls as heavily on the flat as on the slope. Even in our hilly country most of it fell on land more or less flat. It does not run so swiftly on the flat as on the slope. The water passing through

a river or stream has come from an area which is defined exactly. That area is its basin, and is bounded by the watershed. Wherever there is a watershed, the only water to be dealt with is that which falls there. In the stream the water has gathered volume, and is in motion: on the watershed we have the water in detail, and as nearly as possible at rest.

The basin of every river, however great, is made up of the smaller basins of its tributary water-courses. Every stream, every rivulet, has its basin, and every basin its watershed. If we could get a fully detailed map of the basin of any river, marking water-courses blue and watersheds red, it would be seamed with blue lines as a leaf is with veins, and there would be as many red lines as there were blue. These are the foundation facts of my plan. On this plan, if I were going to check the floods, say, of the river near Doomka—the More—which in flood time overflows its channel, 400 feet wide and 12 feet deep, I would begin by getting a good survey of the whole basin, with water-courses marked blue and watersheds red.

I should work along the red lines, avoiding the blue. Wherever I came to a steep hill-side, I should leave it. To check the water there would be costly and difficult. But I should find most of the watersheds on land flat or nearly flat, and manageable. I should deal with the water as Æsop did with his bundle of sticks. The furious,

uncontrollable tumbling mass of water which we see raging in the river More is here at rest, and, taken in detail, easy of control. It would need the skill of a good engineer to work out this plan. The general idea is, by a series of cheap and simple embankments, such as the villagers are familiar with and can manage, to take control of the water, working inwards through the rivulets and streams to the river. The flow of water would be regulated, not blocked. Suitable openings would be left, that it might gradually pass off. It would be let down step by step into the streams. In the streams and in the river itself regulating spurs would be fixed, with gaps sufficient to pass the maximum quantity of water determined on, and no more. These spurs would be repeated at intervals all along the streams and river. The completed schemes would then show us the whole basin except the steep hill-sides covered with chambers empty in dry weather, but filling up when the rain fell. The hill-side water would pass into the river first; and the rest, having been kept back till that was out of the way, would in its turn be let off in an orderly fashion—regulated, in fact, as a London policeman regulates his street traffic.

I conceived that, if we worked inward from the watersheds the whole thing could be done cheaply and easily, and that even in the big streams no very heavy works would be needed.

I thought, and think, that not even a cloud-burst would suffice to break such a harness as this.

I hoped that the scheme would be of use in four ways. It would mitigate the severity of floods in the plains below into which this flood water was discharged ; it would check our own loss by scour ; it would facilitate schemes for the storage of water, and it would cheapen our bridges.

## XVI

### WASTED RESOURCES—TREES

IN the Sonthal Pergunnahs, with a human population of over 300 to the square mile, not to speak of their cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs, poultry, and dogs, the business of forestry proper could not become extensive.

Yet trees were a necessary of life to the people, who needed posts and beams for houses, and poles for roof-frames; carts, ploughs, rice stamps, oil-presses, doors, fuel, and fences.

In the old days timber was a thing to be got rid of, not to be preserved, and was used in a most extravagant way. A plank was made by chipping off the two sides of a log with an axe, for saws were unknown. Cart-wheels were made solid, ploughs were blocked out of a solid lump of wood, and the mortar for the rice stamp was a section of a tree hollowed out. For ploughs, in particular, much big timber was used, since there were in the Sonthal Pergunnahs half a million of them, and in that stony soil a plough wore out in a year.

I believe that it was in the time of our first settlement, in the early seventies, that the Govern-

ment of India woke up to the evil of denudation, and took to forestry. Till then, forest land had been looked on as waste, or undeveloped land. The accepted way of developing it was not scientific forestry, but clearing and cultivating.

Our Damin forests had disappeared. The forest we now see had been nursed up since. Government at this time offered to manage private forests for the owners' benefit, but no one in the Sonthal Pergunnahs accepted the offer. The few landlords who appreciated forestry wanted to manage for themselves; and others preferred to go on as they were. So did their servants and their tenants. The benefits of State management were remote: its immediate disagreeables touched them too closely for the offer to tempt them.

We shall turn now from forests, left out of the settlement, to the 8000 villages included in it.

Each of these villages had in its Record of Rights a statement of what landlords and tenants could do with their trees. It is the trees themselves that I wish now to consider, for rights are of little use unless there is something to exercise them on.

The customs recorded at the settlement had taken shape when each village was a backwoods settlement, isolated by jungle from its neighbours; when trees were of no market value, and villagers were welcome to take all they could make use of. In those days there were no well-defined boundaries, and a tenant who needed wood just

went into the jungle—"no man's land,"—and helped himself.

The advent of the railways, giving a market value to trees, and the new forest policy of the Government, putting it into the heads of landlords that they had wealth in their trees, changed all this.

The settlement fixed the village boundary, outside of which the village had no rights. Within that boundary it included, with the cultivated and homestead land, a slice of the jungle or "no man's land."

Over this land, for which they paid no rent, and from which outsiders were excluded, the villagers had three rights—the right of taking poles up to six inches in thickness, and brushwood for fuel; the right of grazing; and the right of clearing and cultivating. In some villages there was only a little of this land; in others its area exceeded that of the cultivated area. But, much or little, it could not be increased.

Now, let us see how this arrangement worked in practice. We will suppose the case of a village whose area at the settlement was half occupied, and half "no man's land"—250 acres of each. There are fifty families, with their cattle and other live stock. The 250 acres of "no man's land" amply supply their wants in poles and brushwood, and give abundant grazing to their cattle. Big trees over six inches in girth belong to the landlord, and have to be paid for if taken. From the



first to the second settlement there is an interval of some fourteen years. Families have grown up; land has been taken into cultivation. Of the 500 acres belonging to the village, 400 are occupied, and the "no man's land" is now only 100 'in place of the 250 acres. But this has to supply poles and brushwood to eighty families instead of to fifty, and grazing is wanted for more cattle. Will any of this 100 acres be left by the time another settlement comes round? Probably not. The moment a fear arises that there is not a sufficient supply to go round, the pace of destruction is sure to quicken. Every one hastens to secure something before all is gone. This man clears an acre or two, that man must repair his house, and people are more active in cutting brushwood. The village reserve is soon a thing of the past, and the tramping and nibbling of the cattle make it quite sure that no tree will ever lift its head there again.

Sometimes the doom of the trees comes more swiftly. The head-man brings tenants in from outside, prematurely clearing the unoccupied land, or he sells the trees. Sometimes the landlord joins in the scramble. There are landlords who claim that they can take every stick of wood in the village when they like. One landlord actually swept off all the trees in his villages, that the tenants might have to buy their wood from his forest outside, over which they had no right. I remember one painful case of rioting which arose from the cutting down by a speculator, to whom the landlord had

sold it, of a beautiful village fuel reserve which the head-man had been carefully nursing for many years.

If the tenants suspect the landlord of meditating acts like this, bad as it is for themselves, they will destroy their own trees to prevent his doing so. Whether hastened or not by the interference of the landlord, or the misconduct of the head-man, the system arranged for in the settlement must, if continued, end in the destruction of the village trees. The mismanagement and greed of landlords and their servants, and the extension of clearings were equally busy agencies in the destruction of trees in the forests outside the villages — already too small to supply all the posts, beams, doors, cart-wheels, ploughs, and other things, for which the demand grew daily greater.

The problem of the mohwa trees in particular gave us much anxiety. So numerous were they that they shed a harvest of their own in the manna of their blossom, and we looked on them as one of our main safeguards against famine. But they were dying out. They could not be reproduced in the fields, because they would only grow in jungle; and some landlords had even taken to felling them and selling them for the timber.

It seemed to me that we were drifting towards that terrible calamity, a wood famine.

A wood famine comes on more gradually than a food famine. It is not so sensational, but causes real misery. Import is no practical substitute for

a local supply. The shadow of a wood famine was upon us. What were we to do?

My memory is somewhat confused as to what was done, what was proposed to be done, and what was only talked about. I set down our various plans as well as I can remember them.

We had first to revise our definitions, and distinguish forest from waste. Forest must no longer be "no man's land." Something of this sort had already been done for areas outside settled villages. It must now be done within them. Tenants must no longer be allowed to clear for cultivation parts of the village fuel reserve whenever the fancy took them. We found it a good plan in the Damini to allow reclamation for rice fields, but not for the cultivation of pulse. It was ordered that fuel reserve and grazing ground should be marked out at the new settlement as land not available for cultivation. But how was the growing population to find an outlet? By emigration, of course. Thousands were being crowded out. Better that they should go before destroying the comfort of the village.

The concurrent rights of landlord and tenants to cut the same trees ought also to go. I proposed a new clause for the Record of Rights, providing that where the area under trees was larger than was needed for fuel reserve it should be divided into two parts—one for the landlord, and one for the village. The change was sanctioned for villages where the parties agreed to it. I cannot remember if it was agreed to anywhere.

Then the tenants' concurrent rights to cut village trees must be restricted. But restriction meant permits, and who was to give them? Permits from the landlord meant blackmail to his servants.

The only person to give permits was the head-man, and he could only be trusted if well looked after. For this the Hakims were too few, and too busy. Here was a duty which I wanted punchayets for. They would have supervised the head-man's management of the village trees.

All these were plans for saving from diminution our existing sources of supply. As a reserve source of supply we also vindicated the right of a tenant, which some people disputed, to grow trees as a crop. Fruit trees were an admitted class of crop, but if trees for fuel were allowed to grow on occupied land, the view was sometimes taken that the land had reverted to waste. This view was overruled.

Much land had been cleared and cultivated as the only means of possessing it. The land was often poor, the rent nominal—3d. to 6d. an acre; and the crop of pulse it yielded was less valuable than a crop of trees would be, especially if trees became scarce. The question how a tenant was to be prevented, if he sold his trees, from mixing stolen trees with his own, would settle itself if the practice of growing crops of trees should become prevalent. The only case known to me was that of the Damin Highlanders, who had the privilege

confirmed by long usage, of selling fire-wood from the hills in the villages and towns below. This was a destructive practice. It bade fair to destroy even itself by destroying its own sources of supply.

But a larger reform was wanted.

The system of village reserves had broken down. Even if a patch of trees could be established in every village, it would be almost impossible to manage all these little patches in a satisfactory way.

I had in my mind a system of central fuel reserves for groups of villages, which might rear not only poles and brushwood, but also large timber for posts, beams, doors, ploughs, and other useful articles in places where the supply of large timber had failed. For the management of these central reserves I depended on the punchayets.

It seemed to me also that trees should be made into an article of commerce, which people could grow and sell, like grain or cotton or any other necessary, and which no one should expect to get for nothing. This seemed to be by far the surest way of maintaining the supply up to the amount of the need. In the Sonthal Pergunnahs trees could be made to grow anywhere simply by keeping the cattle off when they were young. It was a matter more of care and attention than of capital; and there was no reason whatever why in such a country any ordinary villager, if he were protected from thieves and extortioners, should not do quite

as good business with his trees as with his rice and maize.

But my ideas on the whole subject were very loose. I wanted help from two sources—from our forestry experts in putting them into shape, and from the punchayets to carry them out, with the good-will of the people. In matters connected with trees a hostile people will bring to nought the most cunningly devised plans for improvement.

The central reserves seemed to be our only hope of reproducing mohwa trees. If sown amid the growing forest they might live and thrive. When planted in the open, they always burst their bark and died.

## XVII

### CONCLUSION

WHEN for the last time I left the Sonthal Pergunnahs in the year 1900, I bade farewell to District work. I had already served for short terms as Commissioner in the Bhaugulpore and Chittagong Divisions; and completed my active service as Commissioner by a month or two in Orissa, and two years in Burdwan. This enabled me to scrutinise my plans and ideas from fresh points of view.

Towards the end of my service, I was impressed with the loss caused to the Public Service by the passing into oblivion with each officer who retires of a fund of useful experience. I felt that mine would, in all probability, be lost even to myself, so quickly does one get out of touch with the work after ceasing to take part in it. I, therefore, while still in the service, put on record what I considered to be the most valuable lessons which my own experience had taught me—a sort of “Official Will.”

This was afterwards, on the suggestion of the Government of Bengal, expanded and published

under the title of *A Plea for the Better Local Government of Bengal*.

The Government of Bengal distributed copies with favourable remarks among its officers, from which I infer that the contents met with approval.

I have not yet heard that any use has been made of any of my plans or suggestions. But the eight years that have elapsed since the book was published have been stormy and eventful; and, after all, what are eight years in the life of a people?

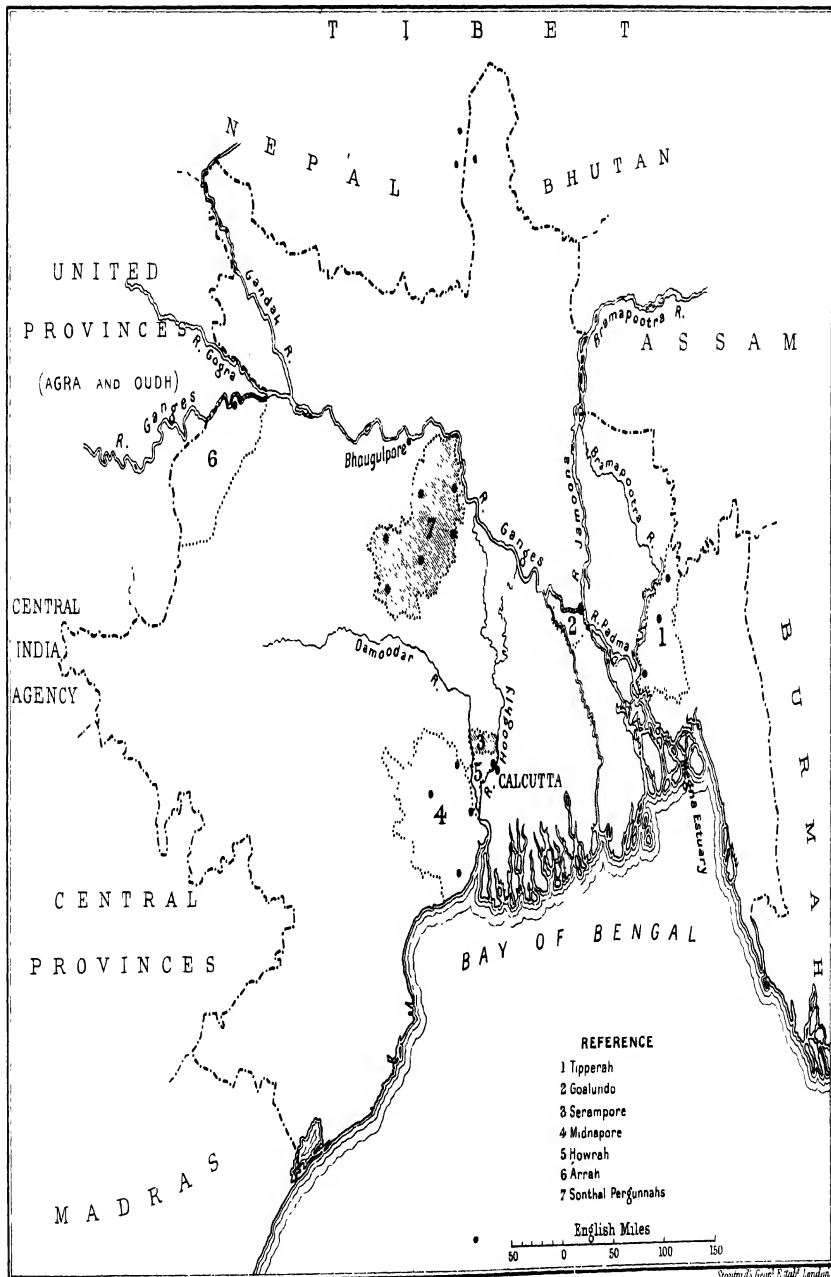
The problems are continuing; and my solutions are the outcome of practical experiment. I permit myself, therefore, to hope that some of my plans will yet be thought worthy of a trial; and that they will bring some little benefit to the people among whom I lived many years, and made good friends, and with whom so much of my heart still remains.

THE END





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